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Miss Belladonna

A Child of To-day

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Boston Transcript

WEDNESDAY, JULY 23, 1902

/ / /

Caroline Ticknor, who contributes the ory, "Antoine's Loves," to the July num- r of Lippincott's Magazine, is a daughter Benjamin H. Ticknor, the well-known oston publisher, and granddaughter of illiam D. Ticknor, founder of the historic ublishing house of Ticknor & Fields. Miss icknor has for the past six or seven years een writing short stories for periodicals, esides contributing humorous sketches to e newspapers. Her first book, "A Hypo- itical Romance," appeared in 1896 and was ollowed by "Miss Belladonna," a social atire which was published by Little & rown, in 1897. During the past three ears Miss Ticknor has been engaged in ditorial work, and has compiled twenty olumes of famous selections in conjunction ith Forest Morgan and Nathan Haskell ole; also a library of oratory, in fifteen olumes, in conjunction with Chauncey M. epew. Like all good Bostonians, Miss icknor belongs to literary, dramatic, and atriotic clubs, but she willingly deserts hem all for out-of-door sports when op- ortunity offers.

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MISS BELLADONNA

A Child of Our Time

BOSTON
AND COMPANY
1887

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MISS BELLADONNA

A Child of To-day

BY

CAROLINE TICKNOR

AUTHOR OF "A HYPOCRITICAL ROMANCE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY L. J. BRIDGMAN

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MISS BELLADONNA.

I AM Miss Belladonna — no matter what. I won't tell you the rest of my name because I think that the first part of it is quite enough of a dose for any one.

Moreover, when a person is n't really a whole person, but is merely a little girl, it is hardly worth while for her to have a last name at all, for it 's no real use to her.

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I am always introduced as "This is little Belladonna," and everybody takes it for granted that I am one of the family because they see me in with all the rest; and when I am away from the others, they know it by my strong family resemblance.

We are all very handsome, and look like our great-great-grandparents, whose pictures were painted by some very expensive artist, and hang where everybody can see them as soon as they step into the hall. Mamma says that she wishes that she and papa could afford to have their pictures done by as fine a painter; but I guess it is just as well that they can't, for they are n't either of them as good-looking as their ancestors.

It will be much wiser for them to save up their money to have us children painted by an expensive man.

I have seen queer little pictures of both papa and mamma when they were children, and neither of them can compare with the photograph that I had taken on my last birthday, and which the photographer was so

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proud of that he stuck it up in a big glass case on the wall right side of some women who act on the stage in bicycle costumes.

Mamma says that in old times they did n't know how to make such fine photographs as they do now, and I don't suppose they did; but I know that a good many people don't take pretty pictures even nowadays. I guess if they are real homely you can tell it, whether the photograph is all shined up or not.

Mamma is a perfect little fright in her picture, and has on an ugly striped shawl, which is pinned tight across her shoulders, and she looks as if she did n't dare to take it off. I would n't have a thing like that wrapped around me, even on a sleigh-ride! I don't think that mamma's mother could have had much taste or she would never have done her hair in such a dreadful way; it was brushed down smooth and straight over each of her ears, and then braided and looped up in the strangest style. I should n't think of allowing one of my dolls to wear hers so for one single instant.

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Then papa in his picture has on an awful-looking hat, which my brother would not think of being seen in, and he is sitting up with a queer woolly dog in his hand, as if he were one of those stupid, good little boys in the books which none of the children take out of the Sunday school library.

Children don't seem to care for the same things that they used to like in old times; they are more advanced nowadays.

They are more truthful also, I feel very sure, for those old-fashioned children were so cowed down that they did n't dare to say what they really thought, and I don't believe that they even dared to *think* what they really thought. So they went on pretending to be amused by whatever their parents told them ought to amuse them, and tried to make believe that they were having a good time, which I 'm perfectly sure they never did, only they did n't let people know it, because they never spoke unless they were spoken to, and the grown folks never thought it worth while to speak to them in those days.

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I am glad enough that I did n't live in those times, everything is so different now. Why, we all of us say just what we think about everything, and our opinions are considered just as good as anybody else's. Mamma says that when she was young she would not for the world have dared to offer her parents any suggestions; yet when I told her that her new green bonnet made her look just like papa's Aunt Betsy, she put it right away and has n't worn it since. It is bad enough to be a child even now, but it must have been simply unbearable in old times.

I am a homœopathic child, and never have taken anything in the way of medicine but little sugar pills. I have often taken too many of those, however, and they are fine! I have eaten up as many as sixteen bottles in one afternoon. But I know better than that now! I suppose that it was because "like seeks like" that I ate up so much homœopathic medicine. I asked mamma what else she could expect of a child named "Belladonna." My two little sisters are

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named Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha, and my brother is called Mercurius.

Papa is a very original man. So people say who hear our names. I hope that I shall never grow to be original if that is the way it affects people. But I don't think that was the reason that papa happened to give us such medicinal names.

My aunt Delia says that he did it just as a kind of joke because Uncle Jim, his brother, was a "regular practitioner" (I don't know what that is, but I think it has something to do with his boys having to take castor oil and quinine). Well, Aunt Delia said papa just did it to make Uncle Jim mad, because he made such a fuss when father gave up castor oil and quinine for sugar pills.

It is funny how jokes nearly always make somebody mad. I asked papa one day why it was, and he said it was because "some people could not see the point, and others found the point so sharp that it stuck into them."

That must have been the way with Uncle

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Jim, when papa told him he was going to have a set of "genuinely homœopathic children," though I don't see why *he* should have cared. I should think that *we* were the ones to have minded.

Papa did n't stop to consider us, when he decided to put us all into a homœopathic joke, and I think that was taking a pretty mean advantage of us, when we were all too young to protect ourselves in any way. One such name would have been enough in any family, and would have made a great deal better joke, for almost any joke gets to be pretty stale after a year or so. However, it does n't make any real difference to me, because I am the oldest, and if we had only had one queer name, I should have got it; in fact, I should have been worse off, because the others might have made fun of me, whereas now they are all in just the same box. (Mercurius calls it a medicine box.)

Aunt Delia says that there is one satisfaction about an ugly name, — it is a misfortune that you have a whole lifetime to get used to.

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I don't mind my name very much, after all, because I always tell people who don't know about us, that it is "Bella," and Ipecacuanha pretends that hers is "Anna." Chamomilla is rather worse off, because she can't really make much of anything out of her name except "Millie," which does n't really belong to her.

When we grow up and get married, we are going to change our first names as well as our last ones, and are going to be called just whatever we like.

If I ever have any children, I shall let them name themselves, and then it will be their own fault if they don't get what they like. Parents can't make their children "behave" after they are of age, and I don't see why they should have a right to fasten a name onto them for the whole of their lives. I think that it is taking too much upon themselves for any people to say what other people shall be called forever and ever, without consulting them at all.

I don't think that one first name is enough

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to last a person a whole lifetime, anyway. For instance, a little girl could be called Polly or Dolly or Susie until she grew up, then she might be Rose or Madeline or Violet until she was twenty-five or thirty, and after that she could be Charlotte or Katherine or Elizabeth (which names sound more quiet and settled down). And when she got to be an old lady, she could be Mehitable or Bathsheba or — but it really would n't matter much what she was called at that age, for there would be so few people left to call her by her first name then.

It does n't make much difference what people are called when they are sixty or seventy, for they have grown used to everything by that time, and are not much interested in anything but the welfare of their souls and what they have to eat.

The time that such things make the most difference is when any one is n't "old enough to know better." That is just the age that I am, though my mother says that I think I know better than anybody else. I suppose

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that is one of the traits that I have inherited from my parents.

I can't see why we are more apt to inherit unpleasant things than nice ones. If I were making people, I should try and start them out as well as I could at the beginning, and then it would be their own fault and not mine if they did n't turn out well afterwards.

Papa says that we have none of us inherited his amiable disposition, but Mercurius has his "hay fever," and it comes on a week sooner than his does and stays just as long. Mamma often wonders why it is that none of us have her fine ear for music, when we all have large feet just like hers, so that she feels really mortified when she has to buy us shoes.

I suppose that it is just as well, after all, that we don't inherit all the good traits from both our parents, for we should probably get to be too perfect after a couple of generations, and it would be rather hard to respect our parents when we knew we were so much ahead of them. Then too we could n't have

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any kind of proper feeling towards our great-great-grandparents, knowing what inferior people they must have been.

On the whole, it is better not to be too perfect, for if we were, nothing would be quite good enough for us, and we should probably be dreadfully unhappy on account of not being able to get the sort of things that we knew we ought to have.

Then, if we were all perfect, we should n't be a bit jolly or interesting, or ever want to have the least bit of fun, and the foreign missionaries would n't have anybody to convert, and the minister could n't call us "miserable sinners" or "poor worms" without telling what was not true.

I don't know what Aunt Delia would do if she could n't say she was a "poor worm." She would rather be called that (by herself) than any other name there is. Though the queer part of it is that she does n't want anybody else (except the minister) to call her that, and she even got papa to keep Mercurius in the yard for a whole fortnight

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for calling her a "poor worm," when he thought she had left the room, after reproving him for having on such muddy boots. And yet she called herself that very name only the night before at dinner.

Aunt Delia says we were all born wicked, sinful creatures, and yet she is surprised and pained if we are not as good as pie the live-long time. Mercurius says that he considers it a little too unreasonable, to go round calling people "worms" and then to expect them to behave like angels every instant. He says if he is a "worm" he is just going to get some satisfaction out of it and be as dirty as he likes; indeed, if it were not for fear of getting punished by papa, he says he would not wash his hands or face once more while Aunt Delia is visiting in the house.

Mercurius has real spirit, and he will make a splendid man when he grows up.

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Chapter II On Behavior

COUSIN CHARLIE'S children are very well brought up. They never do a single wrong thing when there is company in the house (except on the sly).

And they answer up like little ladies and gentlemen when they are spoken to, and sit up at table as stiff as Chamomilla's paper dolls, and never ask for anything that is n't good for them to eat. (They are not much like Mercurius in that respect, for he always asks for everything that is bad for him when we have company, because he thinks that

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mamma and papa will be too busy talking to notice what he eats, or else will let him have what he wants for fear he will make a scene if they refuse.)

Cousin Charlie's children all know nice pieces of poetry that they are all ready to get up and recite when their father says, "I wonder if any of you children can favor us with a few verses before you go to bed."

Cousin Charlie knows perfectly well that they can, but he always acts as if it were quite a surprise to him when his oldest boy gets right up, almost before he has finished speaking, and puts his heels together, and makes his "address partners" bow, and begins on "Horatius." When the oldest boy has finished, the next one is ready with "Young Lochinvar," and after that, if the company seem to be real interested, little Mary Anne says "Barbara Frietchie." Generally, however, the visitors show that they are satisfied after "Young Lochinvar," so that Mary Anne does n't always have a chance. They all get five cents apiece afterwards if

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they don't make a mistake, and they each know two pieces, so that if the same company comes a second time they can say something different. Aunt Delia just admires Cousin Charlie's children, and she says that they are "an ornament to the household."

We are not a bit like that, for Aunt Delia says that we are "neither ornamental nor useful." I don't suppose we are, but I guess we have more fun than Cousin Charlie's children, though we are not anything like them in behavior.

We somehow never appear very well before company; in fact, mamma says that we just disgrace her every time that she invites any one to come to the house. If that is the case, I don't see why she keeps on asking people.

We don't really mean to be any worse when there are visitors than at any other time (papa says we could n't be if we tried), but there is something about the excitement of having strangers around which makes us do all sorts of unfortunate things.

Now, if Cousin Charlie's boys are passing

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through the hall and are called in to speak to callers, they are always clean and dressed up, and they turn out their toes and get on their dancing-school walk, and shake hands all round gracefully, and when they are spoken to — never before — they make some polite little speech which charms everybody; while with us it is so different. If mamma ever calls in Mercurius — she has stopped doing it — he is always all covered with mud or dust, and has torn a great hole in his clothes or got a big bump on his head, and his hands are all sticky, so that he spoils the visitors' gloves if they are foolish enough to shake hands with him.

There is not much hope of strangers ever being charmed by Mercurius when he comes into the parlor, for he puts his hands in his pockets and stamps dirt all over the best rugs, and steps on the visitors' toes, if he comes anywhere near them, and before he gets out he always knocks over a small table or stumbles against a chair, so that mamma has to spend all the rest of the call in apologizing for him.

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Not very long ago papa invited the minister to come to dinner, and mamma told us that if we would be good we might all come to the table, as the minister was so simple in his tastes that he would enjoy a regular "family gathering;" she said that he would feel much more at home if he did n't have any raw oysters or ice cream. I don't see why people want to feel "at home" when they go out to dinner. I should think that the less "at home" they felt the more they would enjoy it. I 'm sure I do, and if I did n't I should never go anywhere; but I am not simple in my tastes, and I hope I never shall be.

Mercurius is n't simple in his tastes, either, and he says he would not go to church to any man who was too simple to like raw oysters and ice-cream.

Mr. Jencks (that is the minister's name) is a real nice man, if he is simple, and he told us some first-rate stories while he was waiting for mamma to put on her second-best black silk. He came early, so as to "see the children," he said, and he was not disap-

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pointed, for Mercurius and I entertained him for nearly half an hour before mamma came down.

I guess he thought that Mercurius had a pretty loud voice, judging by something he said while we were talking to him. He said, "My boy, if you ever find yourself in a dense wood without weapons, and see coming towards you a large fierce bear, shall I tell you how to dispose of him?"

"How?" asked Mercurius.

"Why, just speak to him," Mr. Jencks replied, "and he will instantly drop dead at your feet."

Just then mamma came down, so we did n't have any more conversation with him; but Mercurius said to me that he thought that was the flattest joke he ever heard. I thought it was pretty good, though I did n't dare to say so to Mercurius for fear that he would n't give me half of a chocolate cigar that he had in his pocket.

I don't believe that Mr. Jencks is too simple for raw oysters, after all.

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Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha did not come to dinner that night, because they had a dreadful quarrel over an old rubber doll that I used to own. I told Chamomilla one day that she could have it, and then I did n't think anything more about it, so that when Ipecacuanha asked me for it I swapped it with her for a string of amber beads. If I had been upstairs, I could have made it all right with them by taking the doll back myself; but I was down entertaining the minister and I did n't know anything about the fuss they were having.

I did notice that there was a good deal of noise going on overhead, but I did n't think much about it, as we are all fond of jumping off of the big bureau in the nursery, and it sounded about like that.

I guess Mr. Jencks thought that the ceiling was coming through, for he kept looking up at it while we were talking to him, as though he was wondering what could be going on upstairs ; but Mercurius and I were too polite to refer to it in any way. However, when

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mamma was ready to come down, she looked into the nursery to see if Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha were all nicely fixed for dinner, and how do you think she found them?

Why, in a dreadful state. They were all mussed up, with their hair all rumpled and their nice pretty dresses torn in half a dozen places, and Chamomilla had a big scratch across her cheek, and Ipecacuanha a big bump over her left eye, and there was n't so much as a square inch of that rubber doll left. They began by each pulling one arm, and so on, until there was n't enough of that doll left to make an ink-eraser of.

Of course Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha did n't come down to dinner after that, and all that they had was bread and water sent up by the cook.

Mamma said she hated not to send up some milk; but afterwards she wished that she had n't sent them anything, for what do you think happened? It was the very worst thing that Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha ever did, so I may as well tell it.

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Everything was just as quiet as could be upstairs, when we started to go to dinner, and we thought that Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha were sound asleep in bed. As we walked through the hall, Mr. Jencks paused and said, "And where are those two dear little girls that I saw here the other afternoon?"

And then what do you think happened? We all heard a dreadful crash, and down came the whole tray with the bread and water on it, and it landed right close to Mr. Jencks and nearly frightened him to death. Mamma says that if it had fallen on his head, it would certainly have killed him.

I guess Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha are glad it did n't, for then they would have been hung.

After that the dinner went off very smoothly; but I don't think that Mr. Jencks enjoyed it very much, for he seemed quite nervous, and jumped every time that there was the least sound made in the kitchen, as if he thought that something else was going to drop on top of him.

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I don't believe that he will care to come to dinner with us again very soon, after having such a narrow escape. It would have been a terrible thing if the tray had really hit him on the head and killed him, and I suppose we should have all had to stay away from dancing-school all winter, and we girls would have been obliged to wear black dresses with crêpe ruffles on them whenever we went out, — that is, if Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha got pardoned out on account of our being a well-known family. It would n't matter much what Mercurius wore, because men are not supposed to do anything to show their feelings more than to change their neckties and put a wide band on their hats.

Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha did not really mean to drop the tray downstairs; but this is the way it came about. They were so mad at having only bread and water that they were going to run down with the tray, just as soon as we had gone out to dinner, and were going to leave it on a table in the front hall, so that we could all see that they had n't

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touched a mouthful. While they were waiting for us to get into the dining-room, they were just resting the tray on the balustrade, and as they both leaned over to get a look at the minister, they accidentally shoved the whole thing off, and down it came smash.

I can tell you they were scared. They went to bed without one word about supper, or rubber dolls, or anything.

Mamma says that she hopes it will prove a lifelong lesson to them never to quarrel again; but I guess Mr. Jencks will remember it longer than they will, even if the tray did not hit him on the head.

It does sometimes seem as if the things you did when you were n't trying to be naughty were a great deal worse than the things you do when you mean to be real bad.

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Chapter III
Our Dog Tramp.

MAMMA said that there was one thing which she must draw the line at, and that was at having a dog around the house.

She said she was bitten by one when she was a child, and that if we must get bitten, she preferred to have somebody else's dog do it.

I don't see why. I should think it would be pleasanter to be bitten by your own dog that you knew something about, and then if you had to kill him, you could do it without having a fuss with any of the neighbors.

I don't think that Mercurius cared very much whether he had a dog or not, until

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mamma said that she would n't have one for the world, and after that he seemed just possessed for one. I don't see what it is makes people want things so much more when they know they can't have them. Aunt Delia says it is "original sin," but I don't believe it. I guess a thing that everybody has is n't very original.

Well, Mercurius made up his mind he must have a dog, and he gave Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha and me each two cents to help him tease. I think we earned it pretty well, although we did n't have any great effect upon mamma, except that she sent us to bed early for giving her a headache.

Mercurius was n't very grateful, for what do you think he did after getting us all sent to bed on his account? Why, he came up and tried to get the two cents back from each of us, because he said we were "no good" and our "teasing was n't worth anything." But he did n't get his old money back, because we had spent it for candy before we began to tease, so as to be on the safe side. Ipe-

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cacuanha says that she thinks the inside is the safe side.

We were very much provoked with Mercurius for being so mean, and we told him that if we had known we were going to get sent to bed, we would n't have teased for him for less than ten cents apiece.

I don't think that mamma would ever have given in if something unexpected had n't happened; and this is what it was.

When Mercurius opened the front door one Sunday morning, there stood a poor hungry-looking dog on the door-mat, and of course there was nothing to do but to take him in and give him some breakfast, and when mamma saw how meek and grateful he was, she did n't have the heart to send him off.

The dog had n't any collar, and did n't seem to want to go away again; so at last mamma said that we might keep him for a few days, if we would promise not to step on his tail or do anything to make him bite us. And so he stayed on, and we got mamma used to him little by little. He was n't a very nice-

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looking dog, and no one seemed to know just what kind of a dog he was, but he had a very pleasant disposition, which is more important in a dog, I think, than looks. Of course with people it is different. A disposition does n't make so much difference with them if they are only handsome, because they don't have to show it out as plainly as a dog does, and no matter how cross they are they don't bite.

It did seem "providential" (that is what Aunt Delia says when anything she likes happens) that Mercurius should have had a dog come right to him when he had been wanting one so much. I suppose it was n't quite so "providential" for mamma, because she kept saying that it made her actually sick to see such a looking dog around, and that if Mercurius had n't grown so attached to him, she would have had him disposed of at once.

It is funny that the same thing is hardly ever "providential" for two people. The last time I went to see Aunt Delia, she said that it was "providential" that it had rained the day before, as she had just set all her

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plants out, but that same rain kept us from going on a lovely picnic up the river.

We had a good deal of trouble trying to get the right sort of a name for the dog, as nothing seemed to suit him very well except names that did n't suit the rest of us, but we finally decided to call him "Tramp," although we did n't any of us care specially for it, because it really did apply to him better than anything else. I think it is a good deal more sensible to give a dog (or a person) a name that applies, whether it is pretty or not. If we had called "Tramp" some high-sounding name, and then brought him in to show to people, it would have just made him ridiculous, and everybody would have thought he was a great deal homelier than he really was; but when they heard his name they were prepared for something queer, and only said, "Why, he 's not such a bad-looking dog, after all."

Mercurius did really grow very fond of "Tramp," and he borrowed all the money that we had in our banks to buy him a nickel-

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plated collar, which he lost off almost the first time he wore it. Mercurius felt so badly about his losing the collar that we did n't say anything about the money, but he will have to pay it back before next Christmas.

I will say one thing for "Tramp," — if he did have some faults, he never bit anybody but the milkman and the butcher's boy, and they have n't either of them had hydrophobia yet, so that was n't any harm.

But one night something happened which made both papa and mamma so down on "Tramp" that they had him sent right off and we never knew what became of him.

It was like this: one evening mamma had arranged to have a real extra-fine dinner-party, and she got Aunt Susan, who lives just across the street from us, to ask us children all over there to tea, so as to have us out of the way.

Just as we were ready to start, Mercurius, who was rather cross at having to go to tea at Aunt Susan's, declared that he was going to take "Tramp" with him, and mamma told

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him that he was to do nothing of the sort, as Aunt Susan objected to dogs even more than she did, and that "Tramp" was to be locked up safely in the cellar for the evening.

Then Mercurius, who wanted to stay at home, so that he could slip down the back stairs for ice-cream and cake, was very naughty, and said that if "Tramp" could n't go, he would n't, and that he did n't care to take supper with Aunt Susan, because she always talked the whole time about what a perfect child his father was when he was young, and she never had anything but quince preserve for tea, and he hated that.

Just as he was going on in that way, papa came home and he told Mercurius that he need n't go to Aunt Susan's, but that he could go right to bed at once instead, and that *he* would look after "Tramp."

Mercurius marched off without a word, and papa took "Tramp" and chained him up near the kitchen door, and Chamomilla, Ipecacuanha, and I went over to Aunt Susan's by ourselves.

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Well, Mercurius went to his room, and nothing more was thought about him; and all the company arrived and went to dinner, and everything was fine. They were all having a lovely time and lots of good things to eat, when suddenly some one at the table said, "I wonder if the wind is coming up."

And some one else said, "Yes, it must be, for I seem to hear it moaning in the chimney."

Then they all stopped and listened, and they found that everybody could hear a queer moaning sound, which seemed to come from just overhead.

And mamma said that the noise must come from the room above, where Mercurius slept. "It can't be that the boy is crying," she added; then she sent up one of the maids to see if anything was the matter with Mercurius. In a minute the maid came back and whispered something in mamma's ear, and she got right up and said she "must beg to be excused for a few moments," and hurried out of the room.

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While she was gone, everybody tried to talk and be lively, but they all kept looking towards the door and wondering what had happened, and every time a pause came in the conversation the same queer moaning sound could be heard just overhead.

And at last everybody stopped talking, and they all just sat there looking at each other and wondering. And then suddenly mamma appeared at the door, looking awfully scared and beckoning to papa.

"I think that Mercurius is sick," she said, "and he has locked his door, and I cannot get in, and I cannot make him answer, though Mary and I have pounded repeatedly!"

Then papa jumped up and ran upstairs, and began rattling and pounding on the door, but not an answer could he get out of Mercurius, only the strange sighing and moaning sound.

Mamma began to cry, and said he must be very sick and perhaps dying, for she had never heard him make a noise like that before in all his life.

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And by that time all the company had come upstairs, leaving the salad on the table not touched, and they were standing around in the upper entry and sitting on the upper stairs, and trying to help get the door open. One of the ladies got so excited that she nearly fainted away, and they had to have cold water and smelling-salts brought for her.

While they were trying to force open the door, somebody asked why papa did n't get a ladder and climb up to the window. And papa and two other men ran down to find a ladder which was kept in the barn cellar; they were in such a hurry that papa forgot the cellar door was locked, and had to come rushing back for the key, and one of the gentlemen fell over the biggest rubber plant on the piazza and smashed the pot all to pieces. And John the hired man came out of the kitchen just as they were getting the ladder out, and he thought somebody was trying to steal it, and he nearly knocked papa down before he found out who he was.

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But at last they got the ladder up, and the other gentlemen and the hired man held it while papa climbed up to the window and looked in, but it was all dark inside and he could n't see anything.

In the mean time mamma was getting more and more frightened, and it was all that the rest of the company could do to quiet her while they were waiting for the ladder. She said she thought that the gas was probably escaping and that Mercurius was being suffocated, and that he would be dead before papa ever got in through the window. She asked the other ladies if they could n't smell gas, and they all thought that they could, and they all crowded round her and begged her to keep calm.

Finally, papa threw up the window and stepped inside, right onto the top of Mercurius's writing-desk, which of course tipped over and spilled ink all over the carpet, and made papa bump his head against a rocking-chair. Then papa tried to find a match, and he could n't, though he tipped over nearly

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everything in the room, and he did n't have any in his pocket because he had on his dress-suit; so at last he had to get one of the other men to climb up and hand him one through the window.

And all the time mamma kept calling out, "Is he dead? Oh, tell me, is he dead?"

Then papa struck a match and lighted the gas, which had not been escaping at all, and unlocked the door, and everybody crowded in.

There lay Mercurius quiet and still upon the bed, never moving or making a sound, and mamma dropped down upon her knees beside the bed, crying, "He is dead, oh, he is dead!"

Then everybody heard a sharp yelp, and up jumped mamma, for she had knelt right down on top of "Tramp."

And it was "Tramp" and not Mercurius who had made that dreadful moaning sound, and when they looked at him they all saw why. Poor "Tramp" was nearly choking to death because Mercurius had gone to sleep

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holding the end of his rope just like a vise, and "Tramp" had run around the bed-post and twisted the rope so tight around his neck that he was nearly strangled, and that was why he made such a queer noise.

I guess Mercurius is about the soundest sleeper that there ever was, for he never woke up through all that noise and confusion until mamma had taken right hold of him to see if he was still alive. Then he slowly opened his eyes, and what do you suppose he said?

"Is the ice-cream all eaten up?"

It was n't, but Mercurius did n't get a bit, and neither did the company, for they went home right after they found out what the queer noise was.

And that was the end of "Tramp," for he was sent off the next day, and we have never seen him since, and I don't think that he was such a very "providential" dog after all (and I know he was n't, either), for Mercurius has told me since that he did not just come of himself, but that he gave the postman's

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son a quarter to bring him round and leave him at the door.

It's nice to get a thing you want, whether it's "providential" or not, but it is better to have it "providential" if you want to keep it.

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WE all go over to see her three or four times a year, and it is not very much fun, but mamma says it is our duty to do all we can to make her happy, she is such a very old lady.

I should think that it would make her happier if we did n't go to see her, because she never seems to enjoy our visits particularly, or she would urge us to stay longer; instead of which, she always says, "Now, my dears, it is time to get on your things to go home," long before we have thought of starting.

I don't see why it is n't more necessary to make people happy when they are young

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than when they are old, for when they are young, they are able to make the most of it, and they are limber and have the use of their eyes and ears, which are certainly a great help to people when they want to enjoy things; and when they are old they can sit down and think about all the fun they have had in past years.

I suppose, however, that it is less trouble to make people happy when they are seventy or eighty, because they don't want so many things then.

Old Mrs. Jones, who lives down in the village, has always been so fond of reading that no matter how many books the family got for her, she never had enough to read, but now that she has grown real old she is perfectly happy to read one book the whole time, and all her family have to do is to keep setting the mark back.

Aunt Betsey is just as straight as she can be, because when she was young everybody sat in those stiff, hard chairs, that nobody ever wanted to lean back against. Papa says

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that people all used to go to bed very early in old times, and I should n't wonder if it was on account of the chairs being so uncomfortable that they simply could n't sit in them after a little while; they used to get up very early too, papa says, and I suppose that was because they could n't stand the kind of beds they had any longer.

I spent the night at Aunt Betsey's once, and she put me to bed in one of them that was all made of feathers. When she put me into it, I felt as if I had been dropped overboard and was never going to touch bottom, and all night I dreamed that I was being smothered by a pile of sofa-cushions that a whole procession of Aunt Betseys were throwing on top of me, and I got up at half-past four and sat in a rocking-chair until breakfast-time. Aunt Betsey thinks that because she sat in straight-backed chairs when she was young, everybody ought to sit in them all the time now; but I don't see why people should keep on being uncomfortable forever, just because they used to be so once upon a time.

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Aunt Betsey has real pretty little white curls, which are sewed on to the inside of her cap, and she wears a very handsome breastpin with a sample of her hair in it (cut off before it turned white), and all braided as smooth as the haircloth on the furniture she has downstairs.

Everything in her house is in perfect order (and nobody can have any fun in a house like that), and all her things have stood in the same places for fifty or sixty years.

Mercurius says that he should think it would be a real relief to her to have things changed about, once in a while.

But it is n't, for we tried it one day and she had everything put right back, and sent us home without anything to eat.

Usually we get raspberry tarts if we behave specially well, and sometimes a big peppermint all round. We don't care very much for her peppermints, because they are as dry and hard as rocks, and I guess she has had them on hand for a good many years.

When we go to see Aunt Betsey, she always

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keeps us waiting a long time while she puts on her gray silk and her best cap.

Mercurius says it takes her a long time to sew her curls into the other cap; but I don't think that is true. I am sure that she has a different set for each one, for I have noticed that they are a shade yellower in her best cap.

We should n't mind waiting for her to come down, if there was anything for us to do; but we are afraid to touch things, for fear of not getting them back again in the same places, and she knows it if a single paper-weight is turned round. I don't think that her eyesight has failed as much as it ought to have, at her age.

We don't know exactly what her age is, but she is very old. One day Mercurius bet me five cents that she was over eighty, and so we decided to ask her the next time that we went to see her, and we got Ipecacuanha to say she would do it. Mercurius promised to help her out the best way he could, and he did it very nicely.

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Aunt Betsey was showing us a funny little brass candlestick, and she said, "This is as old as anything there is in the house."

"Except yourself, Aunt Betsey," Mercurius put in, and then Ipecacuanha asked her how old she was.

But we did n't find out, for she only told us that we were "very impertinent," and that in future we might remember that "a lady was as old as she looked." And she said that Mercurius was a rude boy because he said that the trouble was you could n't tell how some people really looked.

Well, as I was saying, the most tiresome part of our visits to Aunt Betsey is the waiting for her to come down, because we have nothing to do but to sit in four high-backed chairs with our feet not touching the floor.

Just about the time we all get to feel we can't stand it any longer, she comes down and sits in another high-backed chair, with her hands quietly folded in her lap, and she expects us to do the same, while she asks us how mamma's health is, and how we are

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getting on with our lessons, and what we are doing to amuse ourselves out of school hours. Then she says, if we will be gentle and orderly, we may go up to see her poll-parrot; and sometimes she starts her music-box for us, and after that she says that I have "grown to be quite a little lady," and that she regrets to see that my sisters have their hair banged, and she asks Mercurius what sized boots he wears (because he always sticks them out so far that she can't help seeing them), and that makes him real provoked, as he is quite sensitive about his big feet.

Of course Aunt Betsey is n't used to having children around, and so it is no wonder that she feels rather awkward when she is trying to talk to them.

At one end of her parlor she has a machine that you put photographs in, and then look at them through two eyeholes, and they look perfectly fine, and each time that you turn the handle a new picture comes up. It is the only thing that she has that is much good,

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for the parrot is so stupid he never calls anybody a single name, and I don't believe he knows one improper expression. We have to be very polite and look at the photograph machine one at a time, though of course we all want to see it "first," and Aunt Betsey always turns the handle, for fear we might break it (though any baby could do it), and she turns it so slowly that it takes forever to get round to the beginning.

The last time that we went to see Aunt Betsey we had quite an unfortunate time, so that we are not to go again for a whole year.

She lives three miles away, in a square white house with dark green blinds that seem to be looking at you all the way up the front walk, so as to be sure you don't step on the borders of the flower-beds.

On the last afternoon that we went over to see Aunt Betsey, we did n't any of us want to go, as Mercurius had invited over some boys to play ball with him, and the rest of us wanted to have a funeral for a wax doll that Cousin Charlie had brought home from Europe

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a few weeks before, whose name was "Mary Queen of Scots." Papa told us that the real Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded, and so nothing would satisfy Mercurius until we said that he could have an execution. We told him that if we let him have one, he must promise not to really cut off her head, and he said that he would n't; but when the time came, he pretended that the knife slipped and that he could n't help cutting Mary Queen of Scots' head wholly off. We could n't find a hatchet, and so we had to use papa's best carving-knife, which Mercurius said was so sharp that it cut through her neck in spite of him. Of course we did n't believe that, and Ipecacuanha and Chamomilla cried for nearly an hour, and I slapped him; but the knife was really very sharp, for it cut right through a thick wire that ran up through Mary Queen of Scots neck as easy as could be, and it only made one little nick in the blade, which we don't believe papa will ever notice.

Anyway, if he does notice it, Mercurius is going to tell him that it is his own fault, for

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if he had n't told us about her being executed, we should never have known but what Mary Queen of Scots had died a natural death, and we should still have had our pretty new wax doll.

Well, we had to postpone the funeral, as mamma said that it was a perfect afternoon for us to go to Aunt Betsey's, and that the man would drive us over and leave us there for a nice call while he got the horse shod, and then come back for us at half-past five.

It was no use for Mercurius to try to beg off, for mamma told him that he must go, and sent home all the boys that had come over to play with him.

She said, however, that if he would go and not make any fuss about it, he could buy him a new whip, which he had wanted for a long time.

So Mercurius bought his whip, and off we started, and he made the man as mad as could be, by trying to whip the horse all the way over, and twice he nearly made him run away.

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When we got to Aunt Betsey's, the girl said that she would be down in a few minutes, and so we all sat up in the high-backed chairs as usual. After we had waited there about ten minutes, Mercurius began to walk around and switch at things with his new whip.

He said that if people were company, they were expected to amuse themselves the best they could while they were waiting.

I told him that he had better be careful with his whip, or he would knock off some of Aunt Betsey's graven images from the "whatnot," but he declared he did n't care much if he did, and said he thought that it was time she bought some new ones, and that she was only papa's aunt, and not our aunt at all.

I said, of course she was ours too, only she was our aunt "once removed."

And then Mercurius grew very saucy, and said, right before Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha, that he wished she were "six times removed."

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I saw that Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha were getting rather tired, and so I told them that I did n't think it would be any harm for us to look at the photograph machine, and I said that I would take the first turn at it, being the oldest, and they could see it after that.

So I put my eyes down to it, and I got so interested that I did n't notice what the others were doing until I heard the music-box begin to play. Then I called out to Chamomilla not to think of touching it.

She tried to stop it, but she did n't know the way, and when I went to help her something snapped inside, so that we did n't dare to do another thing to it, although it kept on playing; and just then I looked across the room and saw that Ipecacuanha had climbed up on the tallest chair to reach a big shell which was on the top shelf of the "what-not," while Mercurius was playing that the haircloth sofa was a horse which he was driving from two chairs turned upside down. His playing "horse" would not have mat-

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tered so much, if he had not kept beating the sofa with his whip and bringing out the dust in perfect clouds, so that it was almost impossible to see across the room.

"Oh, stop, Mercurius," I cried out, "can't you see what you are doing?" and "Get down quick!" I called to Ipecacuanha, for I heard the rustle of Aunt Betsey's silk dress on the stairs. "Quick, get down, she is coming!"

I don't know whether my calling out frightened her, or whether it was the rustle of Aunt Betsey's gray silk dress, but whichever it was, a sad thing happened; for Ipecacuanha lost her balance and tumbled over directly on to that part of the "whatnot" which held some beautiful wax flowers under glass and floating on a lovely mirror, and which Aunt Betsey thought the world of, because she made them herself when she was a young lady.

It was an awful moment for me when I looked round and saw Aunt Betsey standing in the parlor door (and I guess it was for her too).

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She just stood there perfectly still for a few minutes and looked.

The room was filled with clouds of dust which Mercurius had beaten out of the sofa with his new whip, and Ipecacuanha was sitting on the floor right in the middle of all the smashed glass and broken wax flowers, and was crying as loud as she knew how. And I don't think that there was one whole petal left on any of those flowers, and the round piece of mirror which was underneath them was broken right in halves.

Then the two chairs which Mercurius was driving from were upside down, and when he tried to pick them up in a great hurry, he tumbled over one, and two spokes fell out from the back of it, and all the time the music-box was playing "Home, sweet home."

I can tell you I wished that we were all at home, and I guess that Aunt Betsey wished so too.

She did n't say one word for a long time, and then, when she did open her mouth to

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say something, she breathed in so much dust that she could only choke and cough. At last she said, "Mercurius, will you be kind enough to open that window?"

In the meantime the rest of us were trying to pick up the broken pieces of glass, and none of us dared look at her or say a word, until at last Ipecacuanha sobbed out, "I'll get it mended, Aunt Betsey."

"It's your behavior that needs mending," Aunt Betsey answered in the loudest voice that I have ever heard her use, "and I hope that you will get it mended, and that your brother and sisters will do the same. Now you may go."

And we did go without another word, except that as we reached the door Mercurius tried to apologize a little, and said, "If I had known your sofa was so full of dust, I never should have beaten it."

We all went over to the blacksmith's shop and sat there while the horse was being shod, and it was a good deal more fun than calling on papa's Aunt Betsey.

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I found that Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha had cut their fingers picking up the broken glass, and so I tore my pocket-handkerchief in halves (as they had both forgotten theirs) and tied them up with it.

We each got an old rusty horse-shoe to take home for good luck, and Mercurius burnt his fingers taking hold of a hot piece of iron which looked as cool as anything, and drove a sharp nail through the side of his new shoe; it only scratched his foot a little, however, and he says that now he knows as much about shoeing a horse as any one.

Aunt Betsey wrote mamma an eight-paged letter, all about the dust, and chairs, and music-box, and the wax flowers, which of course she felt the worst about. She said we had destroyed a precious heirloom that could never be replaced, and which might some day have been ours (Mercurius says he 's glad it never can be his), and at the end of the last page Aunt Betsey said that, "much as she enjoyed having us come to see her, she must ask that when we come again, we come ac-

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companied by parents or guardians, or not at all."

We hope it will be "not at all."

And there is just one thing that I should like to say, which is, if people are going to keep other people sitting in horrid high-backed chairs while they put on silk dresses and best caps, they had better have some kind of interesting entertainment for them while they wait.

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IT is almost Christmas time, and we have each made out a list of the presents that we want. We find that is the only way to do, if we are to get anything we really like.

Last year we left it to the grown people to pick out whatever they thought best, and they bought such absurd things that we decided not to let it happen again. We did n't any of us get a single thing that we wanted, and yet mamma and the others were grieved because we did n't pretend that we thought everything was beautiful.

I don't think there is much consistency among grown-up people; for one minute they

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are urging you to be truthful, and the next they are asking you why you don't make believe that you like the things you just hate.

I am always being told that there is nothing so dreadful as "an untruthful child," but nobody seems to say much about untruthful "grown-up people," and I guess they tell a good many more wrong stories than the children do, only no one makes a fuss about it. If I tell a lie about anything, it is always for some good reason, — either I want something that I can't get in any other way, or I've done something that I'm afraid I'm going to get punished for, or I'm trying to get the other children out of a scrape; but with the grown people, it's ever so much worse, — they just go round telling things that are n't true for the fun of it. I should never think of telling a lie unless I was going to get something out of doing it, but the grown-up people don't seem to mind whether they get any good out of a wrong story or not. They admire other people's things when they think they are "just hideous;" and say that

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they have been having a "delightful time," when they are wishing that they had never come at all; and they urge company to stay longer, when they would give anything to get them out of the house. I guess Mercurius is a good deal more truthful than that, for last Friday, when Tommy Jones was over here playing with him, Tommy said to him, "Don't you want me to stay until six o'clock?" and Mercurius said, "No, I'm sick of playing with you already, and I guess you'd better go home now." I suppose that after a while the habit of "story telling" gets to be so strong in grown-up people that they hardly know they are doing it, and it's easier for them to say what they don't think, to other people than what they really do think.

But to go back to the Christmas presents. Papa says that it is ungrateful not to appreciate things which are given us to make us happy. I don't see why it is, if the things *don't* make us happy.

I think it is pretty mean for people to give you something you don't like, and then ex-

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pect you to pretend that you'd rather have it than something you really *did* want.

Last year I said three times in Uncle Henry's presence that I hoped Santa Claus would bring me a new pair of nickel-plated skates, and I mentioned to Aunt Delia every time I saw her that I was dying for a "little-finger ring" with blue stones in it, and what do you suppose they went and bought me?

Uncle Henry got me a great clumsy copy of the "Arabian Nights," because he said that when he was young, he used to think that there was nothing quite so satisfactory as that. We already have three copies in the house, but I don't suppose that as long as he likes the book himself, it would make any difference to Uncle Henry how many we had; and it doesn't make any difference to me, either, for I wouldn't read them if we had eighteen copies. The stories are all so silly and unnatural, and the people in them have such dreadful names (worse than ours), and they are all "slaves" or "Africans" or

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"Genii," and all the women have on such unbecoming "bloomers." It would be perfectly terrible if you could believe it all, and would give anybody the nightmare, but of course nobody does believe that there are "magic carpets" and "old men of the sea" and "slaves of the lamp," so I think it is just a waste of time to read about such nonsense.

Mamma says that some of it *is* true, for she is a "slave of the lamp" if any one ever was, and that she is a slave of every lamp we have in the house. But of course that is only a joke, made up because Mary Anne forgets to polish the chimneys or trim the wicks or put in oil enough, so that they always smell, or smoke, or go out.

But I was going to tell about Aunt Delia's Christmas present to me. (It was worse than the "Arabian Nights," because Mercurius and I knew where that came from, and we went down and exchanged it for a first-rate game that you play with chips.) After I had let her understand so plainly that I

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wanted a ring, she bought me a stamped leather portfolio, with an inkstand in one corner of it (that won't stay shut down), and two or three boxes of note paper with colored pictures at the top of every sheet, and the pictures are so big that they cover up pretty nearly all the first page. I should n't mind that, as I hate to write notes and would just as soon have a big picture on every page, but I heard mamma say that decorated note paper had gone out of style, and if that is so, I 'm sure I sha'n't write on it (except to Aunt Delia).

Some people think that if you are a child, anything is good enough for you, and the more out of style it is the better; but that seems to me a pretty queer idea, for I should say that when people were being educated was the time to be most particular about letting them have what was the very best style, so that they could grow up knowing what the proper thing was.

I heard a caller say to some one the other afternoon, that it was strange how many

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countrified people there were around town, and that she could n't understand where they came from. Probably they came from families that waited until they were "too old to learn," before they tried to teach them what the style was.

Chamomilla and I found the price marks on the portfolio and the boxes of paper (although Aunt Delia had tried to rub them out), and when we added them up, we found that they came to just as much as a "little-finger ring" with blue stones in it would have cost. Was n't that mean? Aunt Delia said that when she was a little girl (I don't believe she ever was one), she always wanted people to give her writing materials, and that she never could get enough note paper. I told her that I thought it was very nice for children to get what they wanted, but she did n't seem to take the hint.

She and Uncle Henry have been brought up on the "golden rule," so that their one thought is "to do to others as you would that they should do to you," whether the "others" like it or not.

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I thought that I would try getting Aunt Delia something for her birthday that *I* wanted, so I bought her a doll's comb and brush, but when I got it home it was so cunning that I decided to keep it myself; and as I only had five cents left, I bought her a birthday card with "greetings" on it, which was better for her, as she can use it for a bookmark.

I can't see why all the grown people are so fond of pretending that there is a Santa Claus. I have heard them tell some of the worst stories about his driving around with reindeer and coming down little dirty chimneys, where there was n't room for anybody (no matter how thin) to get through.

I think that they really like to believe that one old man can carry around on his back enough presents for all the children in town, and leave them at almost the same moment at every house in the city. They must think that he makes pretty quick work of giving things around, considering that it took papa and mamma more than two hours to fill

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up our four stockings last Christmas eve (Ipecacuanha and I stayed awake and heard them rustling paper all that time).

And in the morning mamma and papa wanted to know "what Santa Claus had brought us," and they made believe that they were surprised at everything we took out of our stockings. I think that was a real deceitful thing for them to do.

Mamma could n't understand why I would n't rather have a "beautiful" copy of the "Arabian Nights" than a pair of skates; she said that the illustrations were so fine that she would have been delighted if Uncle Henry had given her a copy. (I wish he had.)

She felt so badly to think of our wanting to change it off for a "gambling game," that she said we had better buy our own Christmas presents another year, as that was the only way in which we could ever be suited. We were all so pleased at that idea that mamma did n't know what to make of it. You see, she is always comparing us with the kind of a child she was, and she can't get used to

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our being so much more advanced in our ideas.

Papa said that the whole sentiment of Christmas would be gone, if people bought their own Christmas presents, and stopped believing in Santa Claus; but Mercurius told him that he would rather do away with the sentiment and get what he wanted.

Last Christmas afternoon, we were all invited over to Cousin Charlie's to a Christmas tree; and of course we all went, though we did n't care much about it. Mercurius wanted to go coasting instead, and so did I; but we had to give it up because mamma had told Cousin Charlie that it would be a "great treat" for us, and that we would be "delighted to accept his kind invitation."

Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha were all ready to go, because they thought that they were going to get something fine on the tree; but Mercurius and I remembered the last time that we went there to a tree, we only had five-cent jumping-jacks and common little sewed-up candy-bags.

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Mercurius was going to make a fuss and pretend he could n't find his "pumps" and his best necktie, but I told him that it would n't do any good, and that if he took over some of his presents that he did n't like he might be able to swap them off with Cousin Charlie's boys. They are younger than Mercurius, and they think that everything he has is splendid, and are always ready to exchange with him.

So Mercurius took over a silly little game (that did n't have any directions to it), and a humming top (that would n't make a sound), and got a lovely pearl-handled knife and a pair of silver sleeve-buttons for them, which I think was doing pretty well. I tell you Mercurius is smart, for both of Cousin Charlie's boys thought that they had the best of the bargain. I am just proud of my brother.

I got rid of one of my boxes of note paper, but I only could get a fancy scarf-pin for it, which was n't worth but ten cents more than Aunt Delia's note paper.

Cousin Charlie did n't have much of a tree,

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and half of the candles were left over from the year before and would n't burn more than five minutes. While we were waiting for Cousin Charlie to come in, Mercurius tried to help by blowing out one of the candles which was dripping down onto the carpet; he had to jump up to blow it out, as it was higher than his head, and in doing so he set fire to a paper angel and some silver gauze, and if he had n't been smart enough to put out the fire by stamping on the things that had begun to burn, we might have had a bad time. Mercurius singed off quite a lock of his front hair, and all the thanks he got for it was a scolding from Cousin Charlie afterwards for not staying in his seat.

The younger children were all so scared at seeing the paper angel burn up that they were all ready to cry when Santa Claus appeared, and when they saw him, they began to shed tears in good earnest, they were so frightened by his looks. I did n't much blame them for being scared, he was such a looking object. Of course it was just Cousin

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Charlie dressed up in all the fur things that he could get hold of, and he looked more like a bear or a buffalo than anything else, so that the babies thought that he was some kind of a dreadful monster who was going to eat them up, and two of the youngest had to be taken screaming from the room.

I would n't have believed that any grown-up man could have made such a spectacle of himself as Cousin Charlie did. He had on two fur rugs tied round his legs, and Cousin Lucy's sealskin sack and a buffalo robe, and he wore an awful mask over his face, which was enough to frighten anybody, and he was certainly a sight.

Then he was all stuffed out so as to look fat, and it was all that I could do to keep Mercurius from running up and punching him to see what he was padded with.

Cousin Charlie's children all thought that he was really Santa Claus, until we explained to them that there was no such person, which made Cousin Charlie awfully mad when he found it out, and he told us that we were

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trying to rob them of all true childish enjoyments.

Mercurius asked if he did n't mean "all *un*true childish enjoyments," but Cousin Charlie would n't answer him.

If he could have seen himself as Santa Claus, Cousin Charlie would n't have thought that there was so much enjoyment in it, and anybody who knew him would have recognized him right away by his voice, which is sort of high and squeaky.

He stamped around in a pair of big rubber boots, and said how cold it was, and how poor Santa Claus had suffered from frost and snow on his trip from the north pole. Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha both giggled out loud at the idea of his suffering from cold all rigged up in furs and buffalo robes, and Mercurius whispered, so that everybody could hear him, that he could see the perspiration running down Cousin Charlie's face under the edge of the mask.

I should have thought that he would have been too uncomfortable to want to stay

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dressed up very long, and would have given the presents right out, but instead he seemed to like being Santa Claus so much that he could n't bear to begin on the tree, and he kept us waiting for ever so long, while he made a speech all about his being much pleased to find such a lot of good children in this neighborhood, and so well brought up (he looked at his own children when he said that, for he does n't think that we are at all well brought up).

I don't know how much longer Cousin Charlie would have kept on talking if something had n't happened to interrupt him.

And this is what it was. The tree was standing in one corner of the parlor, and as nobody could see the back of it, nearly everything was hung on the front; it was a pretty big tree, and I guess that perhaps Cousin Charlie did n't have enough decorations to cover the whole of it, and was glad of a chance to hang everything on the front side. Of course he had to fasten the tree at the top so as to keep it from bending for-

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ward, and he went and tied it with a heavy piece of string. Well, one of the candles was too near that string, and after a little while it burned it right in two, and then all the heavy things on the front of the tree began to pull it over, and just in the middle of Cousin Charlie's speech, while he was all muffled up so that he could n't see what was happening, over came the whole tree, crash, and then we had some fun, I can tell you!

Chamomilla, Ipecacuanha, Mercurius, and I were all four sitting right down on the floor in the front row, so that Santa Claus would n't overlook us, and of course we were way underneath the tree when it came down.

I did feel rather frightened for a minute when it first fell over, as a hard candy animal hit me right on the nose, and I was n't quite sure what had happened. But I knew in a minute, for I heard Mercurius say, "The one-sided old tree has come over on top of us," and then I crawled out after him, and we pulled out Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha from under the branches. They were all covered

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with candle wax and were both crying, for they thought that there had been an earthquake, because the teacher had just been teaching them about earthquakes at school the week before.

Everybody rushed forward to help, and they all got so excited trying to keep the candles that had n't gone out from setting things on fire, that they stamped on things and smashed things right and left.

Cousin Charlie tore off as many of the fur rugs and buffalo robes as he could get out of, and shoved his mask up over his forehead, and went to work, and he looked a good deal more like one of the fire department than like Santa Claus, having on his rubber boots and with the mask sticking out like a helmet. Somebody ran out and got a pail of water and poured part of it on the tree after all the candles had been put out, which was n't very much of a help, but which soaked down some of the presents and spoiled two picture-books.

Cousin Charlie set the tree up against the

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wall, and said that "accidents would happen in the best regulated families" (that is the kind his family is), and he hoped we were not any of us hurt, and that now some of the children could help distribute the presents if they wanted to, as most of them were on the floor. When he said "some of the children," I suppose he thought that two or three would come quietly forward and help him pass things round; but by that time we were all so excited that everybody rushed pell-mell and began to pick up everything that they could lay hands on. And they all grabbed as many presents as they could get hold of, and Mercurius filled every pocket he had until they stuck out in lumps all over him, and I guess we all carried away our share of that Christmas tree.

Cousin Charlie tried to stop us, and he kept calling out, "I can't have this," and, "You must all take your seats instantly;" but he did n't have the least effect on anybody, not even his own boys, who knew that the best things were intended for them, and were

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bound to get them if they could (and they knew they did n't stand much chance with Mercurius around).

And so at last Cousin Charlie gave up trying, and just sat down, saying, "Well, I wash my hands of the whole thing; settle it among yourselves." And we did, and I think we cleared up that tree pretty well, pop-corn and tinsel and all.

I 'm afraid that Cousin Charlie will have to buy him a new parlor carpet, for you never saw anything like the mess that was around that tree. The candle-wax was all stamped into the carpet, and it was soaked with cologne from a lot of broken bottles as well as with water from the pail, and the smashed glass was all stepped on and ground up fine and mixed with chocolate drops and marshmallows and jujube-paste.

When we came to go, Mercurius told Cousin Charlie that it was the "best Christmas tree he had ever been at," and that we had all had a "great time;" but Cousin Charlie never so much as smiled at all, and

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only said that he was glad to see that we were none of us going away "empty-handed."

That is what he said, but I don't believe he meant it, for I think he was provoked, because he knew that Mercurius had got most of the things he intended for his own boys.

"I tell you what it is, Cousin Charlie," Mercurius called out to him just as we were going out of the door, "you 'd better tie up your tree with wire next year, if you are going to hang all the things on one side."

And what do you think Cousin Charlie said to Mercurius? I guess he was feeling cross about the parlor carpet, for he said, "Yes, my man, I will save the string to tie you children up with next year."

I think that it is just as well not to give people good advice unless they are feeling good-natured.

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WE have an engaged cousin, and she is engaged to a young man who has four horses and a yacht.

Her name is Cousin Marie Louise, and she is very pretty, but we don't think very much of *him*. His name is Thomas Winchester Jaffrey, and he is awfully polite to us when Cousin Marie is round, but at other times he does n't pay us the least bit of attention.

He seems to think that he just about owns our house when he comes to call on Cousin Marie, who is making us a visit; and if Mercurius and I come into the parlor, he acts as if we had n't a right so much as to cross the

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threshold. Not that we care to stay in the room where he is, except to tease him, as he never has anything interesting to say; but it is rather aggravating to have a person asking you why you don't run away and play, as soon as you appear at the door.

He acts as if he could n't understand how Cousin Marie can want us round, and I heard him asking her one day if we did n't tire her awfully; but she is real fond of us and told him "No, indeed, not at all," and she got him to take us out on his yacht one day.

I can tell you it was a fine boat. I never saw anything so clean and polished up in my life, and we went all over it, and had luncheon on board, and it was great fun.

There was a beautiful breeze that day, and I guess that Mr. Jaffrey thought that he would get us all seasick, so that we would never want to go out in his boat again; anyway I heard him telling the skipper to take us as far outside as he could, and it was awfully rough.

He did n't make any of us seasick, however,

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except Cousin Marie, and she felt so badly that she had to go and lie down in the cabin and have a lemon to suck. She has always boasted about being such a splendid sailor, that I suppose Mr. Jaffrey never thought of her getting seasick.

As soon as she began to feel badly, he ordered the boat to turn right round so as to get back where it was smooth; but by that time the wind had gone down, and what there was of it was blowing the wrong way, and it took us nearly two hours to get back, and every time that Mr. Jaffrey went down into the cabin to see how Cousin Marie was feeling, she would say, "Oh, Winchester, are n't we almost in?" And she turned such a dreadful color that we children thought that she must be going to die.

Well, none of the rest of us were the least bit sick and we had just a lark. Mercurius lost his hat overboard twice, and we had to send a man back in a row-boat to get it; and Ipecacuanha hit her head against the boom and raised a big bump on it the size of an

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egg; but Chamomilla and I behaved just like ladies the whole time, so that Mr. Jaffrey would want to invite us out again some other day; and we did all we could to keep Mercurius from being troublesome, but he seemed to feel that he must take hold of everything, and he unrolled every coil of rope he could find and made the skipper as mad as hops.

I don't believe that Mr. Jaffrey will ever invite us out again, because he is provoked about something that we did one afternoon when he was making a call on Cousin Marie.

We locked the parlor door so that they could n't get out, and when Mr. Jaffrey wanted to go, he had to jump out of the window down onto the lawn, and it was quite a high jump too.

Mercurius was watching around the corner of the house to see Mr. Jaffrey jump, and he thought he could get out of the way before he caught him; but Mr. Jaffrey is quite a fast runner, and he had Mercurius by the collar before he had run six steps. And he shook him too. Mercurius says he can feel it yet,

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whenever he thinks of it, for he shook him so hard he made all his teeth rattle, and then he carried him round and held him while he unlocked the parlor door quicker than lightning. He met mamma right in the hall, and told her all about it, and I guess we should have all been pretty badly punished if Cousin Marie had n't begged us off, and she is a trump.

There are two kinds of nice people in the world, — the people who are nice to you when you deserve it, and the people who are nice to you when you don't deserve it; and the first kind are not "in it," with the second, at all.

Cousin Marie is one of the second kind, and I guess that is why she is going to marry Mr. Jaffrey, because *he* does n't deserve it.

I suppose he seems different to her from what he seems to us, for he is always sending her roses and candy (and I guess he would be mad if he knew how much of his candy we had eaten), and of course you can't tell much about a person who is on his best behavior all the time and trying to please you every

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minute; for if you had seen Mercurius the other day when Uncle Jim was here and he was hoping to get on the right side of him so that he would take him to the circus, you would have just declared that he was one of the good boys that die young in the Sunday-school books; and yet after Uncle Jim went home, he fought with a boy and gave him a black eye, and kicked over a table with Chamomilla's teaset on it and made her cry, and smashed two panes of glass with his base ball, when mamma had told him not to throw it near the house.

I think if I wanted to find out about anybody I should wait until I saw how they acted with some of the people they did n't like, when they thought I was n't round.

Last summer when we were away at the seashore, we went on a picnic with Cousin Marie Louise and Mr. Jaffrey, and we don't care to go on another one like it very soon.

Mr. Jaffrey wanted to shoot sandpipers over on the island, and so Cousin Marie said that it would be great fun for us to row over

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with him and take our luncheon and have a "lovely little picnic."

Mr. Jaffrey said that he was afraid that we would find it stupid sitting round while he was off hunting for the sandpipers, but Cousin Marie declared that she should n't mind waiting one bit, as she should take over an interesting book to read while we played on the sandy beach.

Mercurius said that if he went he thought he would rather go with Mr. Jaffrey to hunt for sandpipers, but he told Mercurius that he was n't very "chivalrous" to want to leave the ladies all alone on a desert island, and besides he would be apt to frighten off the sandpipers.

Mercurius said that he supposed it was all right to leave the ladies if Mr. Jaffrey was going to do it, but on the whole he thought he would rather stay with Cousin Marie than go with him, and have everybody think it was his fault if there were n't any birds shot; and he whispered to me that it was funny how particular Mr. Jaffrey was about his

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being " chivalrous " when he was n't troubled about being so himself at all.

We started off quite early in the morning on the day of the picnic, as we found it was going to be very hot, and I guess it was so soon after breakfast that nobody thought we should want much of any luncheon, and the head-waiter forgot to put in any ginger-pop or cold coffee, but Cousin Marie said that did n't matter, as we could find a lovely cool spring on the island which she had heard contained delicious water.

When we got to the boat-landing, we found that all the light boats had been engaged, and so we had to take a great heavy one, which Mr. Jaffrey did n't much enjoy rowing, as they gave him a broken row-lock that squeaked, and a short pair of oars that hardly reached down to the water. He pretended, however, that he thought it was a good joke and more fun than anything else could have been, but he did say once that he could have rowed across in half the time if he had only been in his own boat with a good pair of spoon-oars. Besides

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being very heavy, the boat leaked awfully, so that before we had reached the island we had to sit with our feet up on the seats, which was pretty uncomfortable.

By the time that we had rowed across to the island it had come out a regular scorching day, so that I guess Cousin Marie began to wish that she had stayed at home on the hotel piazza and let Mr. Jaffrey go shooting all alone.

He pulled the boat up onto the sandy beach, and then we all looked around for a shady place, and Cousin Marie said that she saw a big rock at the end of the beach where she knew it would be perfectly cool, and that he could go right along and shoot sandpipers, as we were going to have a lovely time while he was gone. So he took his gun and started off, calling back to Mercurius to "take good care of the ladies" and "not to let the boat float off."

As he walked across the beach, Cousin Marie asked us if we did n't think that he was a fine figure, and we had to pretend we

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did, though Mercurius had just whispered to me that "Mr. Jaffrey was bow-legged."

After he was out of sight, we all took hold of the boat and pulled and tugged at it until we had dragged it as much farther up as we could, so that it would not float off while we went to look for a shady spot. We walked over to the rocks that Cousin Marie had seen; but when we got to them they were all covered with slimy sea-weed, and there was no more shade there than anywhere else, and Cousin Marie decided that she would rather sit on the sand, after all; so we went back and she put up her parasol and sat down with her book, while Mercurius and I went in wading. It was a splendid beach for wading, as we could go out ever and ever so far without getting up to our knees in water; so that we were really having quite a good time, until I stepped on a sharp piece of shell and cut my foot; it hurt me so that I took my foot up quick, and gave a big hop on my other foot and came down on another sharp piece of shell with that, making a deeper cut on my

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second foot than on the first. The salt water made both cuts smart like everything, and I was glad to get my shoes and stockings on again as soon as I could get the sand out of the two cut places, and even then it hurt me a good deal to walk. Mercurius did n't cut his feet, but he tried to stand on two jelly-fishes at once, and they were so slippery that he fell down and got his clothes just soaking.

When we got back to Cousin Marie, she said that she was so hot that she could n't stand it a minute longer on the beach, and she was afraid that Mr. Jaffrey would get sunstruck ; then she said that she could see a farmhouse about a quarter of a mile away, and that we might walk over there and wait, as it must be cooler away from the glare. So we started for the farmhouse, and it was a good deal farther than it looked, and the longer we walked the hotter it grew, and both the cuts on my feet hurt me every step I took, and Mercurius said he was so thirsty that he should choke if he did n't have a drink of water pretty soon.

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All the time we kept looking for the lovely spring of clear water that Cousin Marie had heard about; but we could not find a sign of it anywhere, and we had to climb over a stone wall and a barbed wire fence before we could get to the farmhouse. Cousin Marie tore a big hole in her parasol, and Mercurius made a good-sized tear in his coat, by catching on the barbed wire, and I knocked off one of the stones from the wall onto the sorest of my feet, and I thought for several minutes I should have to cry, but I did n't. Cousin Marie said that even if we were awfully hot, we could get cooled off at the nice farmhouse, and that we should certainly find a lovely cool well near by; so we kept on. But the nearer we got to the house the more tumbled down it looked, and at last we saw that nobody lived in it and it was all boarded up.

Cousin Marie and I sat down on the back doorstep and wondered where the well was, while Mercurius went to look for it; but that doorstep was hotter than the sand, and so we got up and went over to where there was an

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old stone wall, and we tried sitting down on the ground close up to that. In a minute, however, we noticed that the wall was all covered with poison-ivy, which we were sitting right against; and then Cousin Marie jumped up quick enough, and said that she knew she must have poisoned herself and she was afraid I had poisoned myself too.

We heard Mercurius calling out that he had found the well, and we felt glad of that, as we were just parched with thirst; but when we walked over to where the well was, we saw that there was no bucket nor pump, nor anything to draw water up with. We threw in some pebbles and we could hear them splash, so we knew that there was water down below, but that was n't much satisfaction if we could n't get it.

Mercurius said that he would crawl down and get some in his hat, as it was n't very deep; but Cousin Marie declared she would n't hear of such a thing, and grabbed him by the arm and said she should never forgive him if he thought of such a thing, and that we

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must n't drink the water anyway, because if we did we should have scarlet fever or diphtheria, and that she could see that the well was all green and slimy at the bottom, and that she was glad that there was n't any bucket, for then we might have been tempted to have poisoned ourselves "internally" after getting poisoned "externally" by the ivy.

Mercurius pretended that he was disappointed at not being allowed to go down the well, and Cousin Marie thought she had a hard time keeping him from it; but I knew that he would n't have gone down for anything in the world. He 's not anxious to commit suicide, even to quench his thirst.

I saw a little tree at the other end of a field, and I asked Cousin Marie if she did n't think it would be a good plan for us to go and sit under that; but she said that we really ought to go back now at once, as Mr. Jaffrey had probably been waiting for us some time, and he would n't know what had become of us. So we started right back,

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and it was about ten times hotter than when we came, and Cousin Marie walked so fast for fear we should keep Mr. Jaffrey waiting, that I had to run to keep up with her, although both my feet were so sore that I could hardly bear to step on them at all, and Mercurius said that I ran like a "lame chicken;" but he need n't have talked, for his face was as red as a beet, and with his clothes all soaked with salt water which made the color in his necktie all run through his turn-over collar and down on to his shirt, and with a big tear in his coat, he was n't so very much to look at himself.

When we got back to the beach, I expected to see Mr. Jaffrey running up and down and looking frightened to death at not finding us there; but instead he was nowhere in sight, so there was nothing for us to do but to sit down on the hot sand again, and to wait for him to come back.

Mercurius said that he was so hungry that he had almost forgotten how thirsty he was, and he did n't see why we could n't have

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something to eat; but Cousin Marie told him that she thought it would be a great deal more sociable for us to wait until Mr. Jaffrey came back, and that she knew he would n't be gone much longer now. Mercurius did n't say any more about luncheon just then, because Cousin Marie is always so nice to him that he does n't often argue with her; but he told me that he thought the idea of "eating to be sociable" was all nonsense, and he preferred to eat to stop his being hungry, and then to be "sociable" afterwards; moreover, how could you be very "sociable" when you were eating, unless you talked with your mouth full, which was very impolite?

Well, we waited and waited, but Mr. Jaffrey did n't come, and at last Cousin Marie began to get worried about him, and she said she felt sure that something must have happened to him. Mercurius said in my ear that he thought Mr. Jaffrey was such a poor shot that he had missed every sandpiper that he had aimed at, and was ashamed to come

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back without any; but he took care that Cousin Marie did n't hear him, for she was declaring that Mr. Jaffrey had either slipped from some high rock and had injured himself so that he could n't move, or that he had been overcome by the heat; for she said she knew that nothing else would have kept him away all this time.

When we saw how badly she was feeling, we did n't dare mention the luncheon again, although we were nearly starved; but just sat there without speaking, Mercurius chewing up little pieces of sea-weed and I sucking an empty clam-shell.

After we had waited a while longer, Cousin Marie began to walk up and down on the beach, and at last she stopped and said that she did n't know but what we ought to go and look for Mr. Jaffrey, as it would be perfectly cruel to leave him suffering somewhere all alone by himself while we were sitting there enjoying ourselves.

By this time, however, Mercurius was so hungry that he did n't much care what he

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said, so he spoke right up and told Cousin Marie that he thought it was just the other way, and that it was pretty cruel of Mr. Jaffrey to be off enjoying himself while we were all sitting there dying of hunger as well as getting sunstruck; and he said that he was going to have something to eat before he went to look for anybody, because he did n't see any reason why we should be roasted and starved just because Mr. Jaffrey wanted to shoot sandpipers; and he guessed he was old enough to take pretty good care of himself, if he was as old as he looked.

That made Cousin Marie more provoked than I ever saw her, judging by the way she looked at Mercurius; but she only said that she would n't have believed that Mercurius was such a cruel heartless boy, and that we could have our luncheon whenever we wanted it, but she should not touch a mouthful until Mr. Jaffrey came back.

Then she went down and dipped her pocket-handkerchief in the salt water, and put it on the top of her head, and sat down with

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her back to us, and watched the point around which Mr. Jaffrey had gone away.

Mercurius and I felt kind of mean, eating luncheon all by ourselves; but we were so hungry that we could n't stand it a minute longer, and as long as Cousin Marie had her back turned, we could eat with more comfort than if she had been looking at us in her sort of injured way. The luncheon was pretty dry without any water or lemonade or ginger-pop; but we managed to get it down, although the hard-boiled eggs rather stuck in our throats.

After we had eaten all we could, we went and sat down side of Cousin Marie, and we all three watched the point for Mr. Jaffrey; and Mercurius told her he was sorry he had shown so much temper about the luncheon, and that she had better not worry much about Mr. Jaffrey, for he had heard him say that he had a big life insurance, and that if he was killed he guessed Cousin Marie would come in for a good part of it.

While we were all sitting with our eyes

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fixed on the point, Mr. Jaffrey suddenly came up behind us and wanted to know what we three were all looking at so intently.

Mercurius and I thought that Cousin Marie would be so delighted to see him back alive that she would fall sobbing into his arms, the way people do in books; but instead she just kept her head turned away from him and never smiled one bit, when he dropped down on the sand and asked if she was tired of waiting for him.

She would n't speak to him at all for some time, but just looked straight at the light-house across the bay, while he kept asking if anything was the matter, and then she turned around, and said, "Oh, no, indeed nothing, only it was very kind and thoughtful of him to bring her out there to sit all alone for hours in the broiling sun." (She seemed to have forgotten that Mercurius and I had been with her all the time.)

Then Mr. Jaffrey said that he felt dreadfully about it, and that he did n't mean to stay away so long; but that he had to go half-way

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round the island before he found any sandpipers, and that then he thought that he could take a short cut back so as not to be so long away. The short cut, however, led him right into a deep swamp, so that he had to turn back and go round the long way after all, and that he was awfully sorry to have kept her waiting all that time. (He did n't mention us, although I guess we were as tired of waiting for him as she was.)

But Cousin Marie seemed to be real provoked with him still, for she did n't seem to care whether he got into a swamp or not, but only asked where were the wonderful birds that were so much more interesting than she was.

And then he showed us six of the tiniest little sandpipers you ever saw. I guess he was kind of ashamed to think he had been so long just getting those, and Cousin Marie laughed a short little laugh and said she hoped he felt repaid.

Then he began to get provoked, and he said that she knew that he was going shoot-

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ing, and it was her own idea coming over with him.

And Cousin Marie said that she was glad of a chance to find out how much he cared for her society, for now she knew, after seeing those six little invisible birds, how highly she was valued.

Then Mr. Jaffrey said that she was very unreasonable, for she knew that he would n't have gone off if she had n't said she was going to enjoy herself in a cool, shady place, where he supposed she was all the time.

By that time Cousin Marie was about ready to cry, and she told him that she would like to have *him* find a cool, shady spot on that old island anywhere, or a drop of water to drink, or even a stone wall that was n't covered with poison ivy; and that if he had cared the least bit for her, he could n't possibly have stayed away for even half an hour, no matter if he had been obliged to wade through a swamp that was up to his neck.

All this time Mercurius and I were kind of

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walking round and making believe that we were n't listening, and I thought that certainly Cousin Marie would break their engagement right off; and Mercurius said that it would be pretty bad if she did, for then probably Mr. Jaffrey would swim ashore or get a fisherman to take him in his dory, and that we should have to row that great heavy boat home, and he thought that perhaps they would feel better if they had some of the luncheon; so we hurried and brought it over to them.

I guess it was just what they needed, for even before we got it to them they seemed to be feeling pleasanter, and after the first sandwich Cousin Marie began to inquire how deep the swamp was, and by the time they had eaten up the sponge cake they had made up and were just as devoted as if we had n't been there at all. Mercurius and I ate some luncheon with them, and just as we were all beginning to feel a little jolly in spite of not having any water to drink, Mr. Jaffrey jumped up and asked, "How about the boat?"

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"Oh, the boat is all right," Mercurius said; "it's way up on the beach."

"Why, but the tide has gone out half a mile," Mr. Jaffrey called out, running over to where the boat was standing high and dry. "I should have thought you would have shoved her off when you saw the tide going down."

That was all the thanks we got for nearly killing ourselves trying to drag that old boat up on the beach.

"You told me not to let her float off, and I did n't," Mercurius answered.

"Well, I thought that you had some common-sense," Mr. Jaffrey said, beginning to pull away on the boat, which was so heavy that he could barely move it at all.

Well, for the next half-hour we all worked at that boat; and if Cousin Marie was hot before Mr. Jaffrey came back, I guess she was a good deal hotter afterwards, for she insisted upon helping as much as anybody. We all pushed and pulled and shoved, and then we only moved the old thing a few

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inches at a time; so we took the oars and used them for kind of rollers to roll the boat along on, and as fast as one oar rolled out from behind, Mercurius picked it up and ran round and put it under the bow of the boat again, and so on until at last we had the old tub down to the water's edge; and I wish you could have seen those oars then, they looked as if they had been all chewed up by some wild animal, and I think that Mr. Jaffrey was glad that they were n't his best spoon oars.

When the boat was at the water's edge, Mr. Jaffrey waded right in and shoved until she floated, and I guess he was wetter by that time than if he had walked right through the swamp; then he walked back and picked up Cousin Marie and carried her right out and set her down in the boat. Mercurius and I stood on the beach watching him and thinking that when he had put Cousin Marie in the boat he would come back and carry us out, as we were a good deal lighter than she was; but oh, no, he just held on to the

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boat and called out to us, "Come on, children; you will have to wade right in." And in we went, shoes and stockings and all; and we came to the conclusion that a beach that is fine for wading is not always so fine to launch a boat from.

And that was the end of our lovely picnic with Cousin Marie and Mr. Jaffrey, and I don't think that any of us were very sorry to have it over. I 'm sure Mr. Jaffrey was n't, because he was so tired that he could hardly row home; and Cousin Marie had a bad headache from sitting so long in the hot sun; and Mercurius and I were about as tired as we could be from helping get off the boat, and I wish you could have seen our clothes.

When we had rowed about half-way home, Cousin Marie said, "And what did you do with those sandpipers, Winchester?"

And Mr. Jaffrey said he was sure he did n't know, but that he thought he left them somewhere on the beach when we were getting the boat off.

Mercurius asked him if he was n't going

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back for them, knowing how much trouble he had taken to get them; but I don't believe he cared much about them, after all, for he said that he would n't go back for them if they were "six archangels."

When we came ashore, I heard him sympathizing with Cousin Marie, as if she were the only one who had had a horrid time; and this is what he said to her as we all climbed up the gangway that led off of the float. He said, —

"Never mind, we will have a first-class picnic next week when my yacht gets here, to make up for all this; we will have the finest picnic that this place has ever seen, but we won't have any 'small fry' on board."

And that, Mercurius says, is what comes of trying to be "chivalrous."

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Chapter VII.
An Old Fashioned Party.

ON the twenty-second of last February we were all invited to a kind of "George Washington party."

When I say a "George Washington party," I don't mean one where they have "hatchets" or "cherry-trees," or don't tell any lies, which of course people have to do at parties, but a kind of party where everybody comes dressed up in "cocked hats" and in the sort of clothes that George Washington and his friends used to wear.

Aunt Delia is always telling us about the "quiet, simple old times" when people did n't

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begin to want as many things as they do nowadays; and from the way she has talked about them, we all supposed that George Washington's people did n't care what they wore or how they looked, so long as they had "freedom" and "love of country," and got the "Declaration of Independence" signed, and had patriotic sons and daughters, who gave all their blankets to the freezing soldiers, and ran out to fight without their coats and with pitchforks in their hands.

Mercurius and I supposed that most of the patriots looked like the picture we have in the nursery, of "Putnam the brave" dashing along on horseback in his shirt-sleeves with an old pair of overalls on, worse than the ones our hired man wears when he is weeding the garden.

So when mamma said that Mrs. Fairfax had invited us to an old-fashioned party, I told Mercurius that I did n't think we should look very nice, all in home-spun dresses and cowhide boots and old floppy felt hats, and that I would rather go to a party where I

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could wear my pretty embroidered muslin with the pink bows.

But Mercurius said that he thought it would be "just fine" to go to a party where you did n't have to be dressed up, and where, no matter what you did, you could n't hurt your clothes. He said the one thing that spoiled parties was that people were all so dressed up that they did n't dare to do anything for fear of hurting their best things (I never saw Mercurius stop doing anything *he* felt like, on account of his best clothes), and if he had his say about parties, Mercurius declared, he would tell all the children to come in the worst things they owned, as everybody knew that they could have ten times more fun in them.

You see, Mercurius thinks that "having fun" at a party means racing all over the house with half a dozen boys after him, and crawling under chairs and tables, or playing that "tug of war" game where you sing "open the gates as high as the sky," and where all the "apples" pull against all the

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"pears," and everybody ends up in a big scrabble on the floor, with all the boys on top of each other as if they were playing football.

Now, I like to have a good time as well as Mercurius does, and so do Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha, and we are none of us "babies," but we don't care about rolling over on the floor in a great heap of arms and legs, or pulling off our slippers and throwing them about. We enjoy "Going to Jerusalem" and other games that we can play without having our hair-ribbons pulled off or our sashes untied.

So when Mercurius felt so sure that we should have to go in calico aprons and flannel shirts if it was to be an old-fashioned party, we girls began to think we should rather stay at home, knowing how much ruder the boys would be in their old clothes.

We soon found out, however, what an old-fashioned party was, and we have made up our minds that Aunt Delia has given us a good many wrong ideas about George Washington and his friends.

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They were not such a simple lot in the way of clothes, after all; for, judging by the kind of things they wore, I think they must have spent nearly all their time and money in "getting themselves up regardless," as Mercurius says.

I guess George Washington must have been a pretty smart man, after all, in spite of never telling any lies; for if papa had to get himself up in such a style, he would never have a minute left to do any business in, not to mention being "father of his country," and "taking command of the army," and "crossing on the ice," besides keeping a diary, which is about as hard a thing as can be done, I think.

Some people, however, don't mind keeping a diary, because they feel that their thoughts are so valuable that it is their duty to set them down before they forget what they are about, and I suppose they think somebody will enjoy reading them in after years; but of course they never do. I know I would n't read one of Aunt Delia's diaries unless I was

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pretty hard up. She has kept one for over twenty years, and she says it is one of her greatest pleasures to write in it daily; but she is different from most people. Why, I believe she would like to make martyrs of everybody in the world if she could do it without using up all the "persecutors."

Aunt Delia gave me a diary last January, because she said it was time that I began to "chronicle my daily thoughts," and I wrote it up for nearly two weeks; but I found that I didn't have any "daily thoughts" to "chronicle," and I got tired of writing down "clear and cold," or whatever the weather happened to be.

I decided after the second week in January that it was better for my memory not to write down things that happened; for if they were important, I ought to remember them anyway, and if they were n't, the sooner I forgot them the better.

Of course, if any one is as famous as George Washington, it is a great help to the people who are writing history to have him

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keep a diary, although it makes it harder for the folks who have to study it.

Mercurius and I are not very fond of history, and we prefer the characters, like Homer and Shakespeare, that very little is known about. It is so much easier to get a clear idea of them in your mind; while with people like Washington and Benjamin Franklin you might study about them forever without knowing half there is to be learned.

But to go back to George Washington's clothes. Why, he wore shoe-buckles, and knee-buckles, and silk stockings, and satin waistcoats, and lace frills in his sleeves, and a great big wig, and plush knee breeches, and a lace fichu at his neck, and I don't know what else. I guess Aunt Delia would not find time to write a whole page a day in her diary, if she had to dress like that.

And Martha Washington and the ladies of that day wore full satin petticoats and brocaded over-dresses and high powdered hair, and little black patches on their cheeks, and I don't believe that they spent as much time

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worrying over the welfare of the country as Aunt Delia does.

I guess it is harder to run the country nowadays than it was then, it is so much bigger, and there are so many more newspapers to find fault with the political candidates, too.

Well, we girls had a good deal of fun getting ready for that old-fashioned party, as mamma went through a lot of old trunks in the attic and we tried on all kinds of queer silk dresses that belonged to our great-great-grandmother whose portrait hangs in the front hall. I guess she had more things than the other seven of our great-great-grandmothers, and I suppose that is why all the family seem to think so much more of her than of any of the rest. When I was smaller, I used to think she was the only great-great-grandmother we had, until Cousin Charlie showed us the family tree one day, and Mercurius and I counted up the seven other great-great-grandmothers. I don't believe that the others had money enough to

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have their pictures painted even by a cheap artist, and even if they had been painted I don't think we should have had room for all of them in the hall, and I'm sure almost any room would seem pretty crowded with eight great-great-grandmothers in it, not to mention their husbands. I don't know whether the other seven had any silk dresses or not; but if they did, they wore them all out or made them into patchwork quilts before they died, because we did n't come across a single dress of theirs in any trunk.

Mamma found me a lovely old-fashioned dress which had big bunches of flowers all sprinkled over it, and which she said was just the thing for me to wear, and that she thought I could be Martha Washington in it as well as not, with my hair powdered and done up high on my head.

And she said that Mercurius could go as "George" if he would like to, while Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha being younger need n't go as anybody in particular, but could just dress as "ladies of that time," in anything that fitted them.

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Mercurius said at first he did n't want to go, when he found out it was to be more of a dress-up party than usual; but after mamma had told him he could go as George Washington and have a real wig and a hired suit, he changed his mind.

I decided that I should like to have a real hired costume too, if Mercurius was going to wear one; but mamma said that it would be absurd to put out any money on a costume for me when I looked so well in what we had in the house.

That is the difference between being a boy and being nothing but a girl. Boys have to have everything just ordered to suit them, while the girls are fixed up in anything that happens to be on hand; and we are expected to be as grateful as can be, no matter what we get, while the boys act as if it were a great favor for them to wear the expensive things that have been ordered for them.

It took pretty nearly the whole day of the party to get us ready; but mamma said that she felt fully repaid for all the trouble she

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had with us, when we were finally all dressed up. And she did have a good deal of trouble, for Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha got as cross as two sticks about having their hair done up on the top of their heads, and made her take it down because it pulled, as many as half a dozen times, and I was rather disagreeable because I wanted the silver shoe-buckles that Mercurius had on (and it was just too bad I could n't have them, for they were lovely on my slippers), but of course he had to have everything because he was the "father of his country."

If Mercurius had really been the "father of his country," he might have been "first in war," but I am pretty sure he never for a minute would have been "first in peace," judging by the way he acted about his wig and the lace fixings for his neck and sleeves. He said the lace tickled his wrists and choked him, and that the wig was so uncomfortable he could n't stand it, and so he pulled it off three times and threw it on the floor.

But at last we were all done, and we did

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look pretty fine, especially Mercurius, who made as perfect a George Washington as I should care to see.

Even Aunt Delia, who came over to see us start off, had to own that we were "lovely pictures," though she only said it to mamma when she thought we were out of hearing; but Chamomilla heard her, and whispered it to us.

Mamma was greatly pleased when Aunt Delia told her that Mercurius and I were "perfect Revolutionary types," because Aunt Delia knows a great deal about the things that happened a hundred years ago. She is so interested in what this country did in those times that I don't think she cares one bit about what happens to it nowadays.

The reason she is so fond of those old times is because she belongs to a society which is descended from people who fought in 1776, and she makes a great study of everything that took place in those days.

The society she belongs to is very patriotic, and "anxious to promote the welfare of the

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country" (Aunt Delia says), and they try to get all the nice people they know into it.

Some of the nicest people have a hard time finding any ancestors who fought, although Aunt Delia says they generally come across some one if they hunt long enough. She says that it is strange that many of the people who are not nice themselves have such a lot of splendid ancestors, while others whose names might help on the welfare of the country so much can't find even a single "private," in their family trees. Old Miss Jones, who makes over our outgrown dresses, is descended from three Generals; but of course they could n't have her in Aunt Delia's society.

I'm glad that I belong to a patriotic family, and when I grow up I am going to start a society myself. And I shan't have anybody in it who is n't nice to me or rich and handsome, and has n't at least one great-great-grandmother painted by an expensive artist. And we will have a good time, I can tell you, and nice things to eat every time we

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meet, instead of listening to talks about historic things; and I guess more people will want to come into my society than care to go into Aunt Delia's, for people always have a better time where there are things to eat.

Well, to go back to the party. When we got there, we all felt rather strange in our old-fashioned costumes, and it took me a long time to get Mercurius to go downstairs, because he said he looked like an "idiot," which I don't think was very complimentary to George Washington.

Mrs. Fairfax was waiting to speak to us at the end of their great big drawing-room with the floor polished so shiny that it was pretty hard getting across it on Revolutionary shoes without falling down.

A good many children were there already, but they all looked so changed in their costumes that it was hard work recognizing them, and they all sat around the edge of the room looking kind of scared, and as though they did n't dare to move for fear of some of their Revolutionary clothes coming off.

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Cousin Charlie's boys were dressed as British officers, and they looked very nice in their red coats and high top boots, though Mercurius plagued them fearfully by calling them tories and spies, and offering to fight them both at once, — as if it was their fault that their mother had got them that kind of a costume. As it happened, they were the only "Britishers" at the party, and after Mercurius began it, all the other children kept pointing at them until the youngest actually began to cry, like the baby he is. I felt sorry for them, knowing that their top boots were a size too small and were hurting them like everything, so that they had to pretend they did n't know how to dance in order to keep sitting down as much as possible. They seemed so forlorn that I stayed with them for quite a while, and then I found them a seat on a high sofa in the hall, where they could stay without showing very much, and they never moved from it until supper-time, but just sat there scowling at their boots, which they did n't dare to take off on account of being so well brought up.

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Mercurius found that there were three other George Washingtons in the room, and I discovered at least half a dozen who had come as Marthas, besides a lot of others who had decided to call themselves that name when they arrived and found it was the thing to be somebody.

When the music first struck up, Mrs. Fairfax said that we would now have a Virginia Reel, and that if any children were there who represented George and Martha Washington, she hoped that they would be head couple and lead off.

At that all four Georges just tore across the hall as fast as they could go to see who would get one of the Marthas out first, and of course Mercurius would have led off if the floor had n't been so slippery that he lost his balance just as he was going to bow to one of the Marthas and sat down in her lap instead, which made her so provoked that she danced with another George who was just behind him.

It took Mrs. Fairfax some time to get the Georges and the Marthas sorted out; but she

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finally arranged to have two sets with a George and a Martha at each end, and with the extra Marthas put in next to the head couples.

Mrs. Fairfax said "it was a splendid sight to see us all together," and that we were as fine a set of genuine old-fashioned ladies and gentlemen as one could wish to see.

Later on, however, when we got a little more accustomed to our costumes, we did n't behave as "grown up" as at first; and while we were waiting for our carriage, I heard Mr. Fairfax say to Mrs. Fairfax that if she had told the little savages to come in war paint and feathers the costume would have suited them far better.

We began with quiet games started by Mrs. Fairfax, and ended up with romping ones started by Mercurius and others who did not care about the quiet games; and by the time that supper was ready we were all pretty well tumbled up, and nearly all of our high head-dresses had been shaken down.

All the boys thought it was lots of fun to

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pull the ribbons off of each other's queues, and poor Mercurius had his lovely white wig wholly pulled to pieces by the other Georges, who did n't like it because his costume was handsomer than theirs.

However, Mercurius got even with them before the party was over, and he snatched off every lace ruffle from all their sleeves before they could get hold of one of his silver knee-buckles. I guess he was a good deal smarter and better suited to the part of "father of his country" than any of the others.

All the boys were rather mad when Mrs. Fairfax said she could n't let them play the "tug of war" game, just because the last time that she had a party they broke a fancy china lamp and nearly set the house on fire,— as though she could n't have had things moved away that would be likely to fall over! Mercurius and the other Georges were greatly disappointed, because they were just planning to have a splendid "tug of war," with two Washingtons heading the line on each side.

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In fact, they were so anxious to try one that they got some of the boys to go upstairs and have one in the dressing-room, and they made a tremendous thumping on the ceiling, so that Mrs. Fairfax had to run upstairs to see if any one was injured. And while the boys were up there, they all began to throw the rubber boots at one another's heads, and mixed them up so that hardly a boy got mates when it was time to put them on.

Two of the Marthas lost out their high old-fashioned shell combs, and they were stepped on and smashed to pieces.

And a boy pulled Chamomilla's string of gold beads so hard that it broke and all the beads flew over the floor. We picked them nearly all up, however, except those that rolled down the register, which she was standing near when the string broke.

We had a fine supper, with all kinds of "Revolutionary" ices and "Bunker Hill" monuments, and all the candy we could possibly eat, and more to carry home in shiny paper cocked-hats.

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Mercurius spilled three plates of ice-cream over himself and other people in trying to pass things round, as he had always heard of Washington's politeness, and knew that he could get more ice-cream if he helped himself; the last plate that he spilled went partly over Mrs. Fairfax, who told him to sit down and let the waiters pass things.

Ipecacuanha and Chamomilla were across the room from me at supper, so that I could not tell them when to stop eating ice-cream, and of course they ate so much that they were both sick the next day; and so was I, for that matter.

Chamomilla was really quite sick, however, for she took a bad cold from sitting near an open window in her old-fashioned low-necked dress, and nearly had pneumonia.

After supper Mrs. Fairfax asked us if we did n't want to dance the "beautiful old-time minuet," but she could n't get anybody to do it, as all the children wanted to play blind-man's buff instead.

It was hard getting around in our long

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Revolutionary dresses which kept tripping us up, while all the boys kept falling over their high-heeled shoes when they tried dodging back and forth, and one of the George Washingtons fell down and sprained his ankle so that he had to be carried upstairs and laid upon a bed.

Then although most of the things had been cleared from the rooms, we knocked over a great big vase, and a palm in a fancy flower-pot which broke in two, right in the middle, the neatest break I ever saw; and we made such a draught rushing around that nearly all the pink shades on the candles burned up, and the boys had some fun seeing who could stamp on them first.

Mrs. Fairfax told the children "to do all their eating in the dining-room and to take home their Mandarin oranges in their pockets;" but they forgot about it, and kept on eating nuts and candy all over the polished floor, and they peeled their Mandarins and threw the peel around, and I guess Mrs. Fairfax was rather glad when it was

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time for the "old-fashioned party" to go home.

I felt quite sorry for the maid who was upstairs trying to sort the rubber boots, as she seemed to be having a hard time; but I guess she was pretty stupid, after all, as she helped Mercurius on with some that did n't match at all, the right boot being at least six inches taller than the left one.

Just at the end of the party, before we started to say good-night, Mrs. Fairfax rapped on the mantelpiece until all the boys stopped screaming, and said that we were to end off with a "grand march" in which every one was to join. We were to do it as finely as we could, she said, as she had asked a few of her friends to come in and see us in our pretty costumes.

Then the music struck up a march, and a number of ladies and gentlemen appeared at the drawing-room doors, and others came in and stood around the room looking at us. They all seemed very much amused at something, and I think it must have been at the way

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our costumes looked, for I heard Mrs. Fairfax saying that she was sorry they could n't have seen us when we first came, as we were lovely *then*, in our old-fashioned dresses. I think she must have been quite disappointed at our not showing off better, and I know she was provoked at our having just covered the floor with all sorts of things which crunched under our feet when we marched, not to mention the orange peel which kept tripping people up, so that a number fell down, among them Cousin Charlie's two boys, who had been dragged off the sofa and were trying to walk naturally in their tight boots.

As we passed one of the doors, I heard a young man say, "I think they look a good deal more like 'the beggars are coming to town' than anything else," and I should n't wonder if we did.

Mamma was at the window watching for us when we drove home, and she said that she had been wishing she might have looked in upon the party, as it must have been such a lovely sight.

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She said that she had decided to have us all photographed in our costumes, as even Aunt Delia had expressed a wish for a picture of Mercurius as George Washington, as well as of me as Martha. Moreover, mamma thought that Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha would make a sweet little group standing side by side and each holding up a corner of their Revolutionary petticoats.

When we took off our outside wraps, however, and mamma looked at us, she changed her mind about having our pictures taken, for she said that there was nothing left to be photographed except "shreds and patches."

Mamma made us all stand up in a row in front of her, and just looked at us as though she was about ready to cry; but papa came in, and laughed as if he would split his sides, and said his only regret was that Aunt Delia was n't there to see us come home, for he thought that we looked a good deal more Revolutionary than we did before we started.

And I should n't wonder if we did, for

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we were all torn and pulled to pieces and rumpled, with our long skirts hanging down on one side and hitched up on the other, our kerchiefs twisted round over our shoulders, and our high-dressed hair all toppling over on one side or hanging down over our faces. Ipecacuanha held her shell comb in one hand and a torn lace collar in the other, while Chamomilla handed mamma all the remaining gold beads that could be found.

We girls were a sight; but we were nothing to Mercurius, who was such a perfect George Washington when he left home. He was so changed that papa said he looked more like "old father Time" than like the "father of his country," and I should n't wonder if he behaved a good deal more like "Time" than like George Washington. At any rate, I wish you could have seen his wig!

Mamma said it was just as well she had n't set her heart upon having our pictures taken, because, when she had paid for "George

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Washington's elaborate costume," which was completely ruined, like his wig, there would be nothing left to waste on photographs of such a rude, wild, misbehaving set of children.

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MAMMA and papa were both away on a trip to the mountains when we had our "candy pull," and that was one of the reasons it was such a great success.

It is all very well to have grown-up people around at times, especially when you can't help it, but for real first-class fun, just give me a lot of children all alone by themselves, with nobody else on hand to tell them what to do or what not to do.

I notice that when grown-up people are having a party they pack all the children off to bed right away, or shut them up in the

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nursery, or get their grandmother to ask them over to her house; anything, in fact, to keep them quiet and get them out of sight, so that the grown folks can have all the fun they want to, without a single child around to interfere with them.

And I guess they have pretty good times, too, although they try to make believe that it is just a "quiet social chat" that they are having; for when Cousin Marie Louise was staying here, mamma had a party for her, and I never heard anything like the noise they made; and they played cards, and danced, and sang a lot of college songs, until I thought they never would stop; and Mercurius and I did n't have one wink of sleep until it was all over.

Then they had ever so many more things to eat than we do at our parties; and Cousin Marie's Mr. Jaffrey tried to show them how he cooked venison on the blazer, and he made an awful mess of it, besides exploding the alcohol lamp and setting the table-cloth on fire, and taking all the polish off the table

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underneath; and everybody screamed so loud we thought the house was burning down.

Now, I don't care what any of the grown-up people do at their parties, and I know they ought to have more things to eat because they 've reached "years of discretion" and know how much is good for them; though I don't see how "knowing when to stop" does any good unless you do "stop," which I should n't wonder if the grown-up people sometimes forget to do, as they are just as apt to get sick at their parties as we are.

However, as I was saying, we are willing that they should do just what they want to at their parties, and it seems only fair that they should let us do the same at ours.

But, oh no, they must stand round and advise us, and superintend us every minute, and keep saying, "Now don't you want to try this?" or "I would n't play that any longer," or "Now I really must ask you not to do that any more."

Mercurius says that one of the advantages of being grown up is that you have the right

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to "order round" and "boss" every child in the whole world, and none of them have any business to answer back, and all because you happened to be born a few years sooner than they were, which certainly is not their fault.

We were, oh, so pleased when we found out that papa and mamma were going to the mountains, for we thought that we could do exactly as we liked while they were gone. Mercurius began to plan all the good things that he would get the cook to make, besides ice-cream for dinner every day, and Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha decided not to have their hair curled, and I was thinking that I should n't have to practise; in fact, we all thought we should have a lovely time keeping house by ourselves.

But no, what did mamma do but invite Aunt Delia to come and stay with us while they were gone!

That just spoiled everything for us, for Aunt Delia is one of the hardest people to get along with that I ever saw. No matter how good you are, there is always something

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that does n't suit her. Either your "boots are not blacked," or "your hair needs brushing," or your "nails require attention," every minute of the day.

Then every night she gives us good advice before we go to bed, or tells us stories about what "lovely children" our parents were when they were young, and how they always spoke respectfully to every one, and liked to go to bed right after supper.

And she drives poor Mercurius nearly wild by asking him to "recall every unkind word that he has said during the day" (as though he could begin to do it if he tried), and she gets Ipecacuanha and Chamomilla all worked up, trying to remember at least "one thoughtful action" that they have done since morning, which, of course, they can't (though when they found that she was going to ask them every night, they managed to make up something nice beforehand).

It is a queer thing that some of the people that try the hardest to make you good get you to acting worse than you ever did before,

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while people like Cousin Jim (who came on from the West, and said he hoped we would be just as bad as we knew how while he was at the house, because he did not like good children) seem to have just the opposite effect, for I don't think we did a single bad thing while Cousin Jim was with us, and yet with Aunt Delia we are as naughty as we *can* be most of the time.

I guess some people try so hard to make folks good that they forget to ever try and make them have a good time. That 's the way Aunt Delia does, and she is always worrying for fear we shall have so much fun that we 'll forget we don't deserve it, and her idea of a "good time" is a "time to be good in."

Well, on the day we had the "candy pull," Aunt Delia had to go to a "convention" which was to last the whole day. She did n't tell us, until just as she was ready to start off, that she expected to be gone so long; then she said that we must be very good, as she was going on an "errand of mercy" to decide which of the Heathen ought to be con-

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verted first. "It was a very grave question to settle," she told us, "as some thought that the most depraved ones ought to be converted first, while others said that the best-behaved Heathen had a right to the first chance."

We asked Aunt Delia which kind of Heathen she would rather have converted, but she said she had not yet made up her mind, because although the wickedest needed it most, the best ones were the easiest to convert, which made the question very hard to settle.

Before Aunt Delia left that morning, she told the cook and laundress that they might have a holiday, as Mary Ann could get us all the luncheon we needed. I judged by the expression that Mercurius had on while Aunt Delia told about the Heathen, that he was planning something; and when he offered to walk down and see her on the car, I felt quite sure of it.

After he had put Aunt Delia on a car, Mercurius stopped at several houses where there were boys he knew, and asked them to

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come over and spend the day. And six of them came back with him at once, and several others came over later.

You see he felt quite independent having just Mary Ann at home, as she is always ready to do most anything he says, and lets him have his own way, and never tells on him.

I didn't know that Mercurius was going to bring back any boys with him, so, after he went out, I ran over to Dorothy Simpson's, and asked her to bring her dolls over to my house, and on the way we saw Josephine Brown and her small sister, and got them to come too.

Just as we reached the gate, however, we saw Mercurius and the other boys only a little way behind us.

Mercurius always likes to show off when there are other boys around (and at most any time, for that matter); so he called out, "You need n't think you 're coming to my candy scrape, for I 'm not going to have a single girl at it."

This was very rude of him, considering

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we did n't know that he was going to have a candy scrape, and I was quite ashamed to have the girls hear him talk to me like that; but as I 've learned it 's better not to answer back, I only said, —

"Who wants to come to your old candy scrape? I guess we 'd rather play dolls any day."

"Yes, and you can make 'play' candy for them," one of the other boys put in.

"And it won't make them sick, either," Mercurius said.

"That 's more than you 'll be able to say of all the candy you can make," Josephine Brown answered.

"I guess it is n't," Mercurius said; "I can make the best molasses candy you ever saw, though you may think that only girls know how to cook."

"Oh, anybody can make just plain molasses candy," Josephine Brown's sister called out, "but Josephine makes peppermints, and caramels, and walnut creams, and every kind that you can think of."

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"And I can make elegant chocolate drops," I called over the bannisters as we started upstairs with our dolls. "Come on, girls."

As I got to the top stair, I looked down and saw the boys all piled on to the big sofa in the hall, where they sat swinging all their legs and beating time with their heels on the hard floor, so that they sounded more like an army marching through the house than like a lot of boys all sitting still.

"I say," called up Mercurius, "you girls can bring your old dolls to the candy scrape if you want to."

"Thank you, but we don't care to," I called back; and then we all sat down on the stairs and looked out through the bannisters, not caring to seem too anxious to go down, because we knew the boys would not have asked us unless they had been pretty sure that Josephine Brown could make more kinds of candy than they could.

"Oh, come on," Mercurius urged, "and we 'll all make as many different kinds of candy as we know how, and all the dolls can

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sit around in the kitchen chairs and watch the fun, and we will promise not to touch them."

So we decided to join the candy scrape, and in about one minute we were all in the kitchen ready to help, and opening the cupboard doors, and pulling down things from the pantry shelves; and I guess every saucepan in the house was taken out, and all the other pans and tins besides.

Mercurius is a first-rate one to manage things, and he is great at telling other people what to do, much better than he is at doing things himself; and he kept everybody busy, buttering pans, and finding sugar and molasses, and all the other things that he could think of.

Then he sent off several of the boys for nuts and cream and extra chocolate, which he told them they could charge at any of the stores, as well as any other things that Josephine Brown needed for all her different kinds of candy. And they kept coming back with packages, and bundles, and bottles of

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extract, and Mercurius sent three different boys for the "essence of peppermint," and they each went out and bought a bottle at a different store, so that we had enough of that on hand to last us for a number of candy scrapes.

In about half an hour we had so many different kinds of candy started that it was pretty hard remembering which was which; and by that time the kitchen looked so mixed up that I was glad the cook was having a holiday. And I even hoped that Mary Ann, who had gone out to walk with Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha, would not come home too soon.

Some of the boys were cracking nuts upon the kitchen table with flat-irons, and they made such a deafening noise that nobody could understand what anybody else was saying, as every time they brought the flat-irons down they shook the table and rattled all the knives and forks until it seemed as if they must have danced themselves to pieces.

One or two boys were helping Mercurius

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stir the molasses-candy mixture in the big preserving-kettle, and he let them do most of the stirring, while he kept dripping little spoonfuls of it in a tumbler of cold water (and on his clothes) to see if it was nearly done.

Several others were helping Josephine Brown, who was about as busy as she could be with "caramels" and "peppermints" and "walnut creams" and "butterscotch" upon her hands; and all the helping that the others gave her was to do something wrong each time she asked them to do anything.

I had a hard time trying to make the inside of the chocolate drops roll into balls, as they insisted upon all crumbling up, — a thing they never did before, — and all the boys who tried to roll them with me got them stuck on to the inside of their hands, and had to eat them up to get them off, so that by the time the insides of the chocolate drops were done there were not many left. This did not matter very much, however, as some one dropped a lot of nutshells, thinking they

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were nuts, into the melted chocolate that I was going to dip the cream balls into, and some one else tipped over the whole thing into the coal-hod, so that my chocolate drops were never finished. No one missed them much, I think, as there were so many other kinds of candy being made that very few remembered just how many had been started.

There were so many helping to do so many things, that it was no wonder that we had a rather confusing time, and that boys running across the kitchen with pans ran into others with bowls; and such collisions did not improve the candy or their clothes much, not to mention the kitchen floor.

Josephine Brown got so excited that she put vanilla into the peppermints, and dropped the peppermint into the caramels instead; and many other queer things happened, like spilling all the powdered sugar into the sink, and smashing several tumblers, and tipping over the molasses jug under the kitchen table, so that it took all the dish-towels we could find to wipe it up.

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There was one funny thing about that candy scrape, which was that almost every sort of candy that we tried to make came out a different kind, and some did not come out at all. But all the different kinds were good to eat, and if they did n't turn out just the way they should have done, they tasted well enough, even if eaten from the pan, and there were always half a dozen ready with spoons to eat the candy soft, that would n't harden. They scraped the pans so clean you would have said they had been washed, and all declared it tasted better so.

Mercurius put on so much molasses candy, being afraid there might n't be enough, that it did seem as though it never would be done; and yet it cooked and cooked, until we thought there must be some mistake about the way it acted when we dropped it in the tumblers of cold water, where it never crisped one speck.

Mercurius let the boys take turns at stirring it, until their faces were as red-hot as the stove; and then he said we girls might

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take a hand at it, as though it was the greatest treat for us to stand over the boiling kettle for fifteen minutes at a time, while he himself did not seem very anxious to hold the spoon at all. I never knew more aggravating molasses candy than that was, for it kept boiling over and making the worst mess upon the stove you ever saw, which all burned up and filled the kitchen with smoke, so that we had to put our heads out of the window to keep from choking. And yet it did n't seem to crisp up much more after it had boiled for a whole hour than it did when we first began to try it in cold water.

At last Mercurius said that he would give it just ten minutes more to cook in, and then it would have to come off whether it "crisped" or not, as he was sure it would be overdone, if anything, by that time; and all the others agreed with him, as they were tired of stirring, and had just eaten up the last of the two mixtures which should have been the "walnut creams" and "butterscotch."

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While the boys were waiting, they tried throwing the nutshells sideways over the kitchen clock, to see if they could knock off the cook's thimble, which was on top of it; and they were such good shots they knocked it off at least a dozen times before they stopped the clock; and that last time they lost the thimble altogether, and no one could imagine where it went to, although they looked and looked for it, because Mercurius said it must be found, for he is anxious to keep on the right side of cook.

Well, where do you suppose that thimble was?

Why, it had dropped into the boiling molasses candy, and so, of course, we could n't find it just then; but afterwards we found it, when we began to eat the candy, and then we nearly lost it a second time, because one of the boys was just about to swallow it in a big lump of candy, when the thimble choked him, and so we got it back, which was a good thing for Mercurius, as the cook would never have made him any more sugar-

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cookies or doughnuts if her thimble had been lost.

When the ten minutes were up, Mercurius lifted off the kettle, and it was so heavy that one of the boys tried to help him carry it across the kitchen; but he 'd much better have let Mercurius do it all alone, as he slipped on a piece of butter and nearly spilled the whole thing on the floor; luckily, however, not a great deal of the hot stuff did go over, and that went nearly all upon the boy's own boots, which really looked as if they had been made of tan-colored leather instead of black. Some of the hot molasses went in between the lacings of one of that boy's boots, because the tongue was out, and made him hop around for several minutes pretty lively; and then what did he do, but go and sit down on his foot, which was about as foolish a thing as he could do.

Mercurius said that even if the candy did not "crisp up," it would be "fine to pull," and so he poured it out into a lot of different pans and dishes, and we all burned our

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fingers trying to get it up before it was half cool enough.

At last, however, we all got up big lumps of candy, and went to work at it, although it did stick to our fingers pretty badly; and at one time my hands looked just as if I had put on molasses-candy gloves.

Somebody said that if you sprinkled flour over your hands it would prevent the candy's sticking, and so I got some in a sifter and sprinkled it on everybody's hands, but I don't think it did a bit of good; and I dropped all the candy I was pulling into the flour barrel, and it took four of us at least ten minutes to fish it out again, and then our heads were all covered with flour, and our eyes were filled with it, so that we could n't see for quite a while.

Mercurius said the kitchen was so hot that we could not expect the candy to harden up, and that it would be better to go into the dining-room, where it was nice and cool. So we each took as big a lump as we could manage, and marched out of the kitchen.

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Dorothy Simpson, who had started ahead, put out her hand in which she had her candy, to open the door, which was a very stupid thing to do, of course, as all the candy stuck tight to the handle, and it was rather hard work getting it off again.

The candy did pull a great deal better in the dining-room, although it did n't really stiffen up much; and when you went to pull it out into those long thin strings, some of it nearly always dropped off on the floor, which made the walking in the dining-room almost as bad as it was in the kitchen.

One of the boys said that he thought it would be fine to pull the candy over a hook, the way they do in the store windows, and he and Mercurius looked everywhere to find something that they could throw their candy over; but they could only find the short gas-burners near the mantelpiece, and the long nails side of the hat-rack in the hall, and as the burners were too high they had to use the nails.

The candy acted differently, however, from

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the kind in the store windows, for though it went up on the hooks all right, it stuck fast when it got there, so that they had to scrape it off with knives to get it down again.

Dorothy Simpson asked me if I would n't put my candy with hers, so as to make one great big rope that we could pull way out until we got it "white as snow," and we tried standing on each side of the dining-room table and stretching it across, which was great fun. Just as we were beginning to get the candy real white, however, it broke, and dropped into the jar of maiden-hair ferns, which stands right in the centre of the table, and you never saw a funnier sight than that fern was. It stuck tight to the candy, so that you could n't get the least bit of the candy off without just taking the fern, too, and so we let it stick there as we did n't care to eat the fern.

Just about this time, Mary Ann came back from the walk she had been taking with Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha, and she was so surprised to see the "candy scrape" she

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just stood in the doorway with her mouth wide open, and holding Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha each by one hand.

However, when she went through into the kitchen, she was a great deal more surprised, for she came rushing back, and called out, "Dear, oh dear, I 'd like to have your aunt jest see the mess you 've made."

But Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha were pleased enough to think they had got home in time to have some fun, and as they wanted to pull some candy, too, we gave them each a piece, it being just about as soft as when we first began to pull it, and they went over in one corner and had a lovely time twisting it into "pretty chains." That was all very well, but, after that, what do you think the silly little things wanted to do? They wanted to put the "pretty chains" around their necks! Yes, and they did it, too, and such a dreadful time as they had afterwards, getting it out of their crimped hair, you can't imagine. They cried so loud you might have heard them half-way down the street.

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But, in spite of little things like that, the "candy scrape" was fine, and everybody had a splendid time, better, they said, than they had ever had at any "candy scrape" before; and the one thing that spoiled it at the end was that Aunt Delia's old convention ended sooner than she thought it would, and she came home just in the middle of the "pulling"! And in about three minutes after she came in the candy scrape was over, and all the children had gone home, taking their candy with them.

My! but the floors were sticky; all the way out to the front door the boys had tracked molasses candy, and drops of it were stuck in little patches on the rugs, so that you could not tell them from the pattern until you trod upon them. I don't much wonder that Aunt Delia and Mary Ann were cross as "twenty sticks," while they were working to get the "candy chains" combed out of Chamomilla's and Ipecacuanha's hair.

I felt so meek I hardly dared to face Aunt Delia at all, although I did n't start the candy

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scrape, for I knew she had n't even yet looked at the "maidenhair," which was about as stuck up as anything could be that was n't wholly candy to begin with. But Mercurius was just as calm as if he had n't been all covered with molasses and flour, and with nearly all the skin burned off his fingers, while every step he took his feet stuck to the floor. He looked on just as cool as anything, until Aunt Delia had hung her coat up on the sticky nails, and then he asked her if she had decided which of the Heathen ought to be converted first.

I did n't even dare to look at her as she replied, "The most depraved; and those, sir, are the Heathen here at home."

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Chapter IX.
Aunt Delia and the Plumber.

AUNT DELIA was so provoked about the "candy scrape" that she made up her mind to punish us a little every day for a whole week, so as to make the punishment last a long time.

She said that if we had one big punishment right off we would forget it as soon as it was over, and it would n't do us any special good, whereas if she should deny us something that we wanted every day, we should be constantly reminded how naughty we had been.

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We asked her what she was going to deny us; and she said that she could n't say, but that she should find out each day if there was any particular thing we had set our hearts upon doing, and then she should be obliged to keep us from doing it.

I told Mercurius that I thought that was about as mean a kind of punishment as I had ever heard of; but he said that he did n't mind being punished that way one bit, for he should just pretend each day that he wanted to do something that he really did n't care about, and then it would be a good joke to have Aunt Delia stop him from doing something that he did n't want to do anyway. And then, he said, at the end of the week it would be great sport to tell her that she had n't denied him a single thing that he wanted.

I said I thought that was a kind of cheating, and that when Aunt Delia found it out she would make up some worse punishment; but Mercurius said that "pretending" was not "cheating," it was only a kind of act-

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ing; and that anybody had a right to "pretend," especially in self-defence. Moreover, if Aunt Delia was likely to get provoked about it, he would n't tell her until after papa and mamma got home, and she had stopped having any say about us.

I knew that it was no use to argue with Mercurius about "pretending;" but I made up my mind that I should n't do it, and I told Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha not to do it, but to try not to want to do a single thing for a whole week, so that Aunt Delia would have a hard time finding out anything to deny us.

Well, we never got punished, after all; for something happened which made Aunt Delia forget all about our wrongdoings.

First, something burst in the kitchen and flooded the whole place with water; and the fire in the range had to be put out, and everybody who went into the kitchen stepped right into the water.

Chamomilla thought it was such fun to wade across that she forgot she had on her

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new red shoes, and she spoiled them so she will have to wear plain black ones with her red cashmere dress all the rest of the season; and Ipecacuanha slipped on the zinc in front of the range and sat right down in the water before anybody could tell her not to do it.

It was either the boiler or the water-back that burst; and it could n't have happened at a better time for us, because Aunt Delia was just making up her mind what to "deny us" for the first day, when in rushed the cook and told her the kitchen was all flooded.

"We must send for the plumber," Aunt Delia said, jumping up in such a hurry that she dropped on the floor the book of "Maxims" she was going to read to us and bent the corners of it.

"My, how I wish I could go for the plumber!" Mercurius said, winking at me, while Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha ran out as fast as they could to see the water coming down. You see Mercurius wanted Aunt

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Delia to deny him the pleasure of going for the plumber, as he hates to be sent on errands. But she never thought the first thing about denying him that or anything else, she was so excited about what had happened.

"You may go for the plumber, Mercurius," she said, "and you go just as quick as you can, and tell him to come over here at once."

And that was all the good Mercurius got out of "pretending."

Aunt Delia is a person who tells other people not to get excited, and then she goes and gets more excited than any one herself.

She kept calling for more mops and pails and sponges, when they had more than they could use right there; and she got in everybody's way, and kept asking why they did n't sop up the water faster, when they were doing it as fast as they could, besides running to get all the things she sent them for.

When Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha saw that I was helping with an old mop, they ran and got their best velvet face-sponges,

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although they had been told to keep away from the kitchen; and then they did n't have the sense to squeeze the water from their sponges into a pail, but they took an old tin cullender, which of course had holes in it and let all the water out again as fast as they got it up, so they did n't help very much, and they were about twice as wet as I was before the plumber came. But it was pretty good fun, and Aunt Delia tried to hurry across the kitchen to tell the plumber what the matter was, when she did n't really know as well as he did, and she kicked over the fullest pail of water that the cook had just mopped up.

Well, the plumber said we could n't have any fire in the range for a whole day, and then he went back to his shop to get a helper.

Papa says that if he had his life to live over again he would be a plumber's helper, for it is such a pleasant, easy occupation. Papa is awfully down on helpers, because he says they charge so much for sitting in

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the kitchen and talking to the cook. He says that their conversation is more expensive than any lawyer's, and that they never do one bit of work; so that if they got just nothing they would be overpaid.

I think that papa is kind of hard on the helpers, because the one that the plumber went back for was a real pleasant man, and he did n't talk half so much to the cook as she did to him; and he dropped little lumps of solder into cold water for us, so that we could have it for make-believe money. Then he went back to the shop twice the very first day, to get the tools that the plumber had forgotten; and Mercurius saw him hand things to the plumber a good many times; and he showed us how we could whittle up pieces of lead pipe and make fine sinkers for our fishing-lines.

Well, nothing more happened that first day, except we all had to get on dry clothes and have cold things to eat, and Aunt Delia had a head cold from getting her feet so wet when she kicked the pail over.

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The plumber said that he should have to come and work for several days; and Mercurius and I were glad to hear that, as we wanted the helper to make us some more sinkers. But the helper never had a chance to make any more sinkers because a terrible thing happened to the plumber.

What do you think he did?

He went and fell down the cellar stairs!

It was in the middle of the morning, on Saturday, and the helper had gone back to the shop to get something, and nearly everybody was out of the house. The hired man had gone off, and the nurse was out with Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha, and Aunt Delia had sent the waitress on an errand, so that hardly anybody was left at home; and I wish I had n't been, for I was scared most to death.

When it happened, Aunt Delia had just called me into the dining-room to give me a piece of frosted cake, because I had picked all the bugs off of a long, bent-over fern that the wife of one of her missionaries had given

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her; she thought that it was a good time to give it to me, I suppose, as all the other children were out and there was no one round to tease for any. I guess it was worth a good deal more than a piece of frosted cake to get those bugs off; for the fern was just covered with them, and I don't think that it was much of a present to give a person, — a fern like that.

Aunt Delia said that "we must n't look a gift horse in the mouth." But if he comes and opens his mouth right at you, I don't suppose you can help seeing into it. Anyway, Aunt Delia saw the bugs as soon as I did, and set me right to work to pick them off as soon as she got the fern, and after I had worked at it half of the morning I never got the cake; for just as she was going to get it we heard a great bumping and thumping, and Aunt Delia got as pale as could be.

"What 's that?" she called, running and opening the slide in the china-closet, while I ran out into the kitchen.

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The cook was standing by the sink, and staring at the door at the head of the cellar stairs, and she kept saying to herself, "Howly Moses," "Howly Moses," but never moved one step.

"What has happened?" screamed Aunt Delia, "and why do you stand there looking like that?"

"Howly Moses, it 's the plumber, and he 's killed, he is!" the cook screamed back, and then she ran out of doors and sat down on the kitchen steps and put her apron over her head.

"He 's fell down the cellar stairs," she said, and then she began to cry.

"Go down and see if he 's hurt, you foolish creature!" Aunt Delia called to her; "go as quick as you can!"

"I carn't, mum, I 'm that narvous," the cook said, keeping her head all covered up in her apron.

Then Aunt Delia went out and shook her by the shoulder.

"What! you refuse to help the poor,

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injured man, you worthless woman! Come, Belladonna, we will see what is the matter with him."

Aunt Delia walked over to the door at the head of the cellar stairs; and I got behind her and held on to the strings of her black silk apron, and we listened. It was just as still as anything.

Aunt Delia told afterwards how calm and collected she was; but she looked just frightened to death.

"Are you hurt, my good man?" she called out in the littlest, weakest kind of a voice. Then we stood listening, but never a sound came up from the cellar; only the cook, who had come in when she saw Aunt Delia was going herself to see about the plumber, kept crying, "He 's killed, mum; I told ye he 's killed, and he can't spake."

"Stop your noise, woman, and tell me the man's name," Aunt Delia said.

"Pat Mahoney; and he 's dead, poor boy, poor boy!" the cook kept on crying.

Then Aunt Delia called again, louder,

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"Mr. Mahoney, are you hurt? are you hurt, Mr. Mahoney?" But he did not answer.

Then Aunt Delia began to think he was dead too, and she started down the cellar stairs, and I went after her, keeping two or three steps behind.

It was pretty dark at the bottom of the stairs, but we could see the plumber lying kind of all in a heap, and Aunt Delia went and felt of him.

"The floor is all wet, Aunt Delia," I whispered to her as I stepped off the lowest stair.

"Oh, what shall we do? He 's bleeding to death, I 'm sure he is!" Aunt Delia said, wringing her hands. "We must call in help. Run, Belladonna, and call somebody!"

As I started up the cellar stairs, she ran by me, saying that we must have pillows to put under the poor man's head; so I went after some pillows, and so did the cook; and I ran all over the house, and got every pillow that I could find, and dropped them all over the bannisters, and the cook took them

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as fast as she could, and went and threw them down the cellar stairs; so that by the time Aunt Delia got back she could hardly find the plumber, he was so covered up with pillows.

She came bringing a hand-lamp and two turkey-red hammock cushions she had got out of the attic, and bandages to bind up the plumber's wounds, and she was rather surprised to see the piles of pillows that we had thrown down ahead of her.

"I guess we 've got enough pillows to make it comfortable for him," I said to Aunt Delia, as she set down the lamp and began to throw the pillows out of the way.

"If I can only apply a bandage to stop this profuse bleeding," she said, kneeling down. "Hold the lamp nearer, Belladonna."

"I think the plumber 's an albino," I said, trying to hold the lamp steady when my hand was just shaking as hard as it could shake. "There 's white blood coming out of him. See, the pillows are all wet with it, and it is n't red at all."

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"Mebbe it 's the two pails of water he was carryin' in his hands," the cook called down from the top of the cellar stairs, which was as near as she dared to come.

"Of course it is," Aunt Delia said, dropping the bandages. "This is a pool of water he 's lying in. The poor man 's breathing; let us hope he is only stunned."

Aunt Delia got a pillow under his head, and kind of straightened him out; and then we left him, with all the pillows soaking up the water round him, and ran out of the house to find somebody to get a doctor and to help move him.

Aunt Delia ran out to the gate to see if she could get hold of any passers-by. But nobody seemed to be passing, and so all she could do was to call to a painter who was painting a new house across the street.

She ran over to where he was, and began waving at him.

"Will you be kind enough to come down?" she called.

He was the slowest man to understand

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anything that I ever saw, for he looked round at her, and then kept right on painting.

"Will you come down *this instant!*" Aunt Delia hollered at him.

Then he only looked at her and shook his head, and we could n't tell whether he was deaf or dumb.

"A man has been hurt. A man hurt!" Aunt Delia screamed, as loud as she could scream. "Will you come over and help to lift him up?"

Then the painter began to come down, but he never hurried one bit; and he went and set down his pail of paint as slowly, and put down his brushes as carefully, as if nobody was begging him to hurry as fast as he could.

Well, when we got him over to the house, he was no more good than the cook; for he took one look at the plumber, and then he walked right off.

"He 's dead, sure, and I 'll not tetch him," he kept saying; and Aunt Delia could n't

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make him do one thing, although she offered to pay him any amount. She did get him to say he would go for the doctor, and then he started off at the slowest run I ever saw. He didn't run very far, for I caught sight of the doctor's buggy turning the corner before the painter had got across the lawn, and I ran right out ahead of him, and stopped the doctor, and told him about the dreadful accident that had happened to the plumber.

It 's a very queer thing that when you want people the most they can't be found; but just as soon as you don't care whether they come or not, why, there they are.

As soon as the doctor got to the house all the rest of the people came home. There was the helper walking into the yard with the hired man, and Mercurius coming up the street with three other boys, and Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha turning the corner with the nurse, and the waitress just behind; and so, after not having anybody around, we had too many, for everybody wanted to see the

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plumber, and the doctor had to order them out of the cellar.

Well, the doctor felt all over the plumber, and said that nothing was broken, and he guessed he would be all right in a very few minutes. And he worked over him, and asked for a hot-water bottle to put at his feet, and Aunt Delia could n't get one because the kitchen fire was out and all the water was cold. But in spite of that, the plumber came-to all right in a very few minutes after the doctor got there, and they had a mattress put in the plumber's cart, and he lay down on it, and the helper drove him home.

After he had been driven off, Aunt Delia told us that she was dreadfully worried about him; because the doctor said that although he seemed to be all right, he might be internally injured, and that was a very serious thing. After that we all felt sober and sad for the rest of the day, and nobody dared to laugh, because Aunt Delia said the least we could do was to sit down and reflect upon the

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uncertainty of life and the dangers surrounding us every moment.

But the plumber was n't really hurt at all, and only had to stay in his house a couple of days. Before we knew that he was n't internally injured, we all went over to where he lived, and took him raspberry jam and peach marmalade, and inquired how he was feeling; and Aunt Delia sent him all the frosted cake, and there was n't any fire to make any more, and if there had been, the cook would have been too cross to make it; and so the plumber ate up my frosted cake that day.

And he was all well and able to go to work after two days; but Aunt Delia was sick for a whole week from getting such a shock to her nerves, and that was why she did n't deny us anything but the pleasure of seeing her at table, and that was n't much of a punishment.

And I must say that I think Mercurius and the others got off pretty easily; for they were out of the way when the awful time was going on, while I had to be right there helping Aunt Delia, and nobody asked me whether

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my nerves were shocked or not, nor remembered that I never got my reward for picking off a million little green bugs.

And it was two whole days before we could have any kitchen fire; and we had the horridest things to eat, and everybody got as cross as could be, living on food cooked over a little oil-stove; and another plumber came to take the place of the one that fell downstairs, and he brought a very disagreeable helper, who pretended he did n't know how to make sinkers, and never gave us one drop of solder, and he used such language that we were forbidden to go near the kitchen.

And all the thanks I got for helping to tend the plumber who fell downstairs was a scolding because I threw down all the best pillows, and they all got soaked in water, and trampled on by every one who was trying to wait on the plumber; as if it was n't bad enough to have to sleep without any pillow under my head for several nights without being scolded!

Aunt Delia said that "the cook was excus-

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able because she was ignorant," but that I "knew better than to do such a foolish thing."

Mercurius says that if anything happens, it 's best to clear out as quick as you can, and then you 'll never be blamed for doing just the wrong thing.

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LAST summer mamma decided to take us all up on a farm. She said that she had always heard so much about the pleasures of real farm-life and the healthfulness of it that she wanted to try it.

Mercurius says he can't bear "healthful things," because they 're always something you don't want.

The reason he thinks that, is because mamma went to a kind of "health class" last winter, where she learned all about a lot of horrid things that we ought to eat to keep

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us well; and each time she came back from the class, she told us that some of the things we liked best "were n't fit for us to put into our stomachs."

Mercurius says that he would rather have any disease there is, than eat a perfectly "healthful" diet all the time; but of course he does n't really mean that, because he has never had any very bad sickness, except measles, when mamma read to him the whole time; and chicken-pox, when he could have Guava jelly and white grapes; and when he had whooping-cough, he rather liked it, because he did n't have to go to school or church for about three months. He got the best of *us*, for we three girls had whooping-cough in the summer vacation, when there was n't any school to be kept out from and when nobody goes to church.

So all the satisfaction we got out of having whooping-cough was that we had to stay right near the hotel-cottage all the time and have our meals sent over to us, and we could n't play with a single child. It was

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just too stupid for anything until we gave it to Cousin Charlie's children; and then we had a good deal of fun. We met them at the village one day, and we all coughed at them as hard as we could, and they came down with it in about ten days. It was great, to see the hotel children run whenever we came anywhere near them; and we used to have the croquet ground to ourselves nearly all the time, for we would get out there early and then just cough if any of the other children came up and wanted to play.

I guess that no matter what disease you have, you can get some fun out of it, except a real bad toothache, and I'd like to see anybody get any fun out of that, unless it's the dentist.

I know that when people are sick they expect to stop eating the things they like, and are ready to eat the things that are good for them; but I should think that when people were well, it was just the time for them to enjoy themselves eating all the indigestible things that they happened to want.

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I guess some people try so hard to be healthy that it 's more trouble than being sick. That was about the way it was with us when we tried so hard to find a "healthful summer resort."

Papa heard of a fine old-fashioned farmhouse in the "healthiest" kind of a place, where they had a lovely view, and where the board was very cheap. Aunt Delia had written that she knew "a real natural out-of-door life would agree with all of us," and the more mamma thought about taking us all up there, the more anxious she was to start right off.

She said that on a farm we should have delicious cream, and all the fresh eggs we wanted, and lovely butter right from the churn; while if we went to a hotel we were always tempted to order a lot of indigestible things. Then she said she just longed to get away from the home cares and worries, and that it would be such a relief to go to a place where she did n't have to dress up for every meal.

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And papa said that after a summer at such a cheap place we should have saved money enough to have the house repainted or a hard-wood floor laid in the nursery, or some of the other things done we had wanted for a long time.

Moreover, he said that he would come up and take a nice long vacation if we were in a quiet, comfortable place where he could enjoy himself, and not in a great noisy hotel where there was a band playing all night and a constant hullabaloo going on, and he said it was a real education for us to learn all about animals and vegetables.

The day that we started off for the farm, it was awfully hot and we were glad enough to get out of the train. There was the farmer waiting for us on the platform, and he had two of the queerest old wagons ready to drive us up in, with no covers over them and no backs to the seats to lean against. It was about the hottest ride that we ever had, for the farm was more than five miles off; and first we went up a hill, and then down a hill,

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and then up another great long hill, and so on, the whole way, and the horses could n't seem to go any faster than a walk.

Mercurius got so sick of riding slow that he kept jumping out and running on ahead and then sitting down to wait for the rest of us to come up with him, and Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha kept saying, "Are n't we most there?" And mamma said that she had never taken such a tiresome drive in her life, and she understood from the farmer's letter that he was quite near the station.

Well, at last we came to a white cottage, standing right out close to the road, without any piazza round it, and only one tree side of it. And there we all stopped.

"What! is this the fine old-fashioned farm-house?" Mercurius called out from the road, where he had been running ahead. "I don't believe that there is room for us inside of that!"

Mamma tried to hush him up, as she did n't like to hurt the farmer's feelings. But she need n't have done it, for he did n't have any

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special feelings; and mamma said so herself afterwards, when Mercurius was kicked by a cow he was trying to milk, and Mr. Brown laughed instead of showing the least bit of sympathy.

I guess that mamma was disappointed herself with the looks of the place. However she only said, "You do have a beautiful view of the hills here," and then we all went into the farmhouse.

I think that a pretty view is something that a person can get along without as well as anything there is. If you have all the other things you want, a pretty view is all right, and it is nice to go out and look at it; but if it is the only thing you've got, and there's nothing else to do but to admire it, it's a thing you get mighty sick of.

Before we left home, mamma said that she was looking forward to getting into the "large, airy rooms" which the farmer had written about, after having been cramped up in hotel rooms for so many seasons.

Well, we were more cramped up in those

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farmhouse rooms than any others we ever had, and I wish you could have seen the beds. They were the queerest-looking things. The mattresses were all stuffed with hay, and buttoned down the middle, and when you wanted to flatten out the lumps, you had to unbutton them and poke the hay around. And the beds were so high that we had to run and jump to get up on to them; and they were all covered with funny old comforters instead of blankets.

Ipecacuanha fell out of her bed before she 'd been in it an hour, and got a dreadful bump on her head; and the hay made Mercurius sneeze and sneeze all night, because he has hay fever; so the farmer had to find a corn-husk bed for him the next day.

We were all so tired the morning after we first slept on those hay mattresses that we could hardly sit up to breakfast, but we got used to them after a while.

We had pie and doughnuts and hot biscuits and maple syrup the first morning, and I 'm sure that 's a good enough breakfast for

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any one; but mamma said that was far from a healthful diet, and she got the farmer's wife to make oatmeal porridge and graham bread for us.

That farmer's wife was pretty smart, and I guess she did more work than he did; for she made more pies and doughnuts than any cook we ever had; and she washed dishes, and swept, and churned butter, and fed the hens and the pigs, and did about everything that was done in that farmhouse. She was all the time working just as fast as she could; while Mr. Brown never hurried at all, and he had plenty of time to sit down and talk to everybody about being "so druv with wurk."

Mamma said that it would have been a more "restful" place, if the "dumb" animals had n't begun to make a noise so early in the morning. She said that she hardly got to sleep, after tossing on that lumpy bed, before the roosters began to crow, and the cow-bells to ring, and the cows to moo, and the hens to cackle.

I guess the animals are not so "dumb" as

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the people in the city think, who print that paper with Baalam's ass at the top of it. Why, even the little mosquitoes can make more noise in proportion to their size than Mercurius can. And, my! were n't they thick on that farm! We could n't sit outside one minute in the evening without being most eaten up; and when we sat inside they bit us almost as badly, and after we got to bed it was still worse. They only had a few mosquito bars in the house, and those just seemed to keep in the mosquitoes that were inside; and we kept sending down to the village for more netting to make mosquito nets to hang over all our beds, and then when we all had nets over us to keep off the mosquitoes, we were so hot we could n't breathe. And the windows were so small that hardly any air could come in through them; and they would drop right down if you did n't put a stick under them; and we kept getting our fingers pinched in them and letting them come down thump, by mistake; and Mercurius smashed most all the glass in his window the first night we

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got there; and he set his lamp right close to an old-fashioned mirror that was over his bureau, and cracked it all across, and Mrs. Brown said that no money could replace it, for it was her great-great-grandmother's.

We did learn a good deal about the different farm animals, but I don't think it did us very much good.

Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha were nearly hooked several times by a cross cow; and Mercurius was tossed right up in the air by one of the oxen when he was just showing one of the farm hands that he was n't afraid of him. And it was a wonder he was n't killed. Mamma thought he was at first, and we had to send five miles for the doctor, and it took him so long to come that Mercurius was all well before he got there.

We did n't get any cream hardly, because it was all saved to make butter of; and the butter did n't taste very nice when it was made.

The first time we saw the farmer's wife churning, we did n't know what she was making, and Chamomilla thought it was going

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to be ice-cream. She saw a little stopper sticking out from the side of the churn, and she went and pulled it out, just to see what would happen. And more happened than she expected; for all the cream ran right out on the floor of the shed; and, my! was n't Mrs. Brown mad!

We all ran as fast as we could when we saw the cream coming out; and Chamomilla was so scared that she carried off the little stopper in her hand, and Mrs. Brown could n't run after us because she had to put her thumb in the hole to try and stop the cream from coming out. So she had to stay right there and scream at us; and her thumb was too small to fill up the hole, so the cream kept coming out until she got the stopper back from Chamomilla, and by that time the cream was about all out. Mercurius told Ipecacuanha to run back and tell Mrs. Brown "it was no use crying over spilt milk," and she had no more sense than to go and do it, and she got her ears boxed, and Mrs. Brown said "it was elegant rich cream that we had

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wasted, with no milk about it." Mercurius said to go back and tell her that it was n't much like what she gave us, then; but Ipecacuanha knew too much to go back with any more messages.

After that, we were hardly allowed to step inside of the shed when the churning was going on, and so we could n't learn to make butter. Chamomilla said she was glad of it, for she did n't care to learn how, as she thought "bought" butter was a great deal better than "made" butter.

The farmer was always telling us not to go here nor step there; but he used to let the pigs and the hens walk around everywhere; and the little chickens were underfoot the whole time, and one day Mercurius stepped on two of them by mistake and killed them. And another time he fell down on a cunning little yellow one, and we did n't dare to tell Mr. Brown about it, he was so cross about the others; so we had a private funeral, and not one of us said a word, when they were all trying to find the yellow chicken.

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The hens were not much good, anyway, for they did not lay very fresh eggs, not nearly such nice ones as we had at home; and they made enough fuss about their old eggs, clucking and cackling as if they were laying first-class ones.

There was a very nice hay-barn, ever so much better than the house, and we expected to have a splendid time playing in the hay; but that old farmer would hardly let us look at it. He said that if we tumbled in it, the cows and horses would n't eat it; and he had the ladder taken down from the loft, — as though we were n't smart enough to climb up without it!

Well, we did climb up whenever we felt like it and Mr. Brown was out of the way; and I fell on a pitchfork, and stuck it into my arm, and mamma said it was a wonderful escape.

Mercurius tried to cut hay with the hay-cutter, and he nearly cut off two of his fingers, so that he had to have them dressed and done up for over two weeks; and all

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that time he pretended he could n't wash his other hand, or his face, or even brush his teeth, although it was only his left hand that was cut, and he could use it for about everything else.

Mamma said that we needed a great many more clothes on a farm than we did at a hotel, because something seemed to happen to them three or four times a day. Somehow our feet seemed to be wet all the time; and we could n't pick berries, or go down to look at the pigsty, or the swamp, or the cow-pasture, or even the hen-house, without getting all our clothes stained or dirtied up.

The farm children all went barefoot, and so we thought it would be great fun to try it; and Mercurius made believe that he thought it was "fine" until he cut his feet all over with sharp little stones and stepped on a piece of glass, and then he was glad enough to get back into his shoes. I saw the farm children running over a big field where the hay had been cut, and jumping around as if they were on the softest kind of carpet;

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and they seemed to be having such sport that I took off my shoes and stockings and started to run after them. But, goodness me! Such prickles! I could just hobble and hop along for a few steps, and then I sat down holding on to the soles of both my feet; and I called to Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha to bring me my shoes and stockings, for I had got enough of going barefoot.

One night about six o'clock we were all riding home on a load of hay, and we were having a great time, jouncing up and down and singing, when suddenly Ipecacuanha got lost off.

She was too far back on the cart, and probably one of the "jounces" sent her sliding off behind when nobody was noticing. We never missed her until we were clear home at the farmhouse, and then we hunted all through the hay, thinking she might have made a nest for herself somewhere, but she was not to be found.

Mamma was terribly frightened, and she declared that a fall from the top of a load of

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hay was enough to kill Ipecacuanha, and that we had probably left her dead in the road; and she blamed me for being the oldest and not holding on to her.

Mr. Brown hitched up a wagon, and he and mamma and Mercurius drove back over the road very slowly, and looked everywhere for Ipecacuanha. It was getting kind of dark, so they could n't see very well, and they inquired of everybody they met on the road, and stopped at every farmhouse; but nobody had seen Ipecacuanha, and they did n't know what to do.

At last they got way back to the hay-field, but they had n't found her; and Mercurius ran around and felt of all the hay-cocks, thinking she might be asleep on one of them, like "little Bo-peep;" but she was n't.

Then mamma went and sat down on one of the hay-cocks and began to cry; and she said she should never see poor little Ipecacuanha any more, and she wished that she had never tried living on a farm, because it had tried her more than anything else in her whole life.

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MR. BROWN told mamma that she had better get off of the hay-cock and let him drive her down to the village, so that they could notify people to be on the lookout for a lost child; and then, he said, he would get up a search-party and hunt in the woods, for he thought that very likely Ipecacuanha had felt frightened and had run into the woods, and then had n't been able to find her way out again.

It was pitch dark when they got down to the village, and the farmer was trying to make his old horse go so fast that he did n't

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notice that another team was coming round the corner. Of course it was too dark for him to see anything; and it took so much clucking and whipping to keep his own horse going that he could n't hear any other sound unless it was about as loud as thunder; so the first thing he knew he had run smash into the other team.

The man that Mr. Brown ran into was going quite slow, so he got the worst of the accident; but Mr. Brown said he did a good deal of damage to his own wagon, though I can't see how he could have hurt it much, when it looked just as bad as it possibly could before he drove mamma to the village in it that night. Mamma was awfully shaken up, and she did n't get over being lame for a long time; and Mercurius was thrown clear out of the wagon by the shock, and landed in some blackberry bushes which scratched his face and hands all up; but he did n't mind, because he knew he could have such a good time boasting about it afterwards.

The man who was on the other cart, jumped

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down and began to talk very loud and to feel of his wagon; and he found that one of his shafts was broken, and a wheel.

There was a child sitting on the seat of the wagon beside the man when he was run into, and when the teams bumped together, over she went headlong off the seat and down into the cart among a lot of meal-bags, and there she was kicking her heels and crying.

"Is that child hurt?" mamma called out, after she found that Mercurius was all right.

And then a queer thing happened. The child hopped right up on top of the meal-bags, and began to cry out, "Mamma, mamma!" and lo and behold, it was Ipecacuanha, and not a strange child at all, and she had recognized mamma's voice as soon as she spoke.

So they found out that the farmer they had run into was just driving Ipecacuanha home; and if mamma had only waited there, instead of going to find her, she would have found her just about as soon, and neither of

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the wagons would have been smashed, and mamma would n't have been so lamed up that she had to send to the city for bottles of liniment to be rubbed with.

I suppose it 's true that people who are in an awful hurry to get things do get them sooner; but I guess they don't always get them so pleasantly.

When Ipecacuanha fell off the load of hay, we were all singing "Hurrah, hurrah, we bring the jubilee," so loud that we never knew that she was crying in the road; and she ran after us, but nobody heard her calling, and we left her way behind. Then she sat down on a big stone, and began to cry just as loud as she could; and pretty soon a man came along in an empty hay-cart, and asked her what was the matter; and when she told him, he said he was going right over to Mr. Brown's and would take her over there.

Well, it was another Mr. Brown's that he was going to, and he drove Ipecacuanha way down to the village; and she never knew the difference until she got most there. Then

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she was frightened enough, but he told her not to mind, for they would drive her home right after supper. And so they were taking her back to the farm when mamma met them.

And I guess she wished that she had n't met them, because she had to pay for having both the wagons all fixed up, besides getting frightened awfully and all lamed, and having to walk a mile to get another wagon to ride home in.

Mamma says that she shall never go to a farm again for a "health" diet; because they fry everything, and she could n't tell what kind of meat she was eating, it was cooked so queerly; and the farmer let all the peas and corn grow so big before he picked them that they were as tough as anything, except the chickens, which were the toughest things you ever saw.

Whenever they wanted to have chicken for dinner, they would go and catch a great big hen, and take it out in front of the house, and chop its head off on an old stump, right

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where we could see them do it. And after the hen's head was chopped off it would run round without any head, and it took away my appetite so that I never ate chicken once while I was at the farm; and Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha cried and cried all the first day after they saw a hen beheaded. They said that the farmer was the "cruelest" man they ever heard of; and they got two umbrellas and ran up behind him when he was sitting down and cleaning some harness, and hit him so hard that he would n't let them come into the barn for a long time; and then they got his best-looking straw hat and put it down on top of some sticky fly-paper to be revenged on him. They said that they should neither of them eat any more chicken as long as they lived; and they would n't even take chicken-broth for about six months.

Mercurius just enjoyed the pie that Mrs. Brown made, and he ate it for every meal, and he said it was so good that it made him forget how awfully he was having the hay-fever. What he liked best was squash pie

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with maple syrup on it; he said that was "just out of sight."

All the pie was pretty much "out of sight" whenever Mercurius got at it, and so were the doughnuts. He would eat about half a dozen doughnuts before he began his breakfast at all, and then by the time the oat-meal porridge came on he would say that his hay-fever was so bad that he would have to go out and sneeze, and then he would n't come back for any porridge, but would just eat apple-pie out in the kitchen.

At first mamma was going to forbid us to eat pie so often, but when she found that there was n't much else to eat, she changed her mind and ate it herself.

As there was n't any piazza to the farmhouse, we all had to sit on the one front step that they had, or else in kitchen chairs out in the front path, which mamma did n't like very well, though she liked it better than sitting inside in the stuffy little parlor, where the ceiling was so low that Mercurius could touch it with his hand if he jumped up high enough.

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And when he found he *could* do it, he used to try to hit flies on it, and he killed so many that he spotted the ceiling all over, and we had to have it whitewashed before we left.

Hardly anybody ever drove by that farm-house, except once in a while some old farmer with a load of something; and even that used to seem real exciting, and we used to all run out and stand at the gate and look, if it was only an empty tip-cart going past.

Mamma said that when papa came up to take his nice long vacation he would just enjoy the perfect quiet. She said that "nobody could ask for a quieter place, so far as anything going on was concerned," and she guessed that papa would n't be troubled by any excitement or gayety going on around him.

Well, when papa *did* come up to take his vacation he did n't take a nice long one after all. And when we asked him why he did n't stay a long time, as he said he would, he could n't seem to remember that he had said any such thing; and when he went off, he

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said that if we did n't think it was a long stay, it had seemed long enough to him. You see he did n't have anywhere to go and smoke; as it rained nearly all the time he was there, and there was no piazza to walk on, and it was so chilly that they had a fire in the air-tight stove in the parlor, and that made the room so hot that papa had to keep wiping the perspiration off of his face with his pocket-handkerchief, until he got so heated that he could n't stand it; and then he would take his umbrella and go out and walk up the road until he got so wet and muddy that he had to come back to get dried off; and he could n't see the lovely view at all, because there was so much fog. He tried to smoke in the barn, but Mr. Brown stopped him for fear he would set the hay on fire. And I guess Mr. Brown did n't make a very pleasant impression upon papa, for Mercurius heard him calling out that the boarders could destroy what they liked in the house, so long as they paid for it, but that privilege did not extend to the barn.

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Then papa could n't shave without cutting himself because the looking-glasses were all so kind of wavy. I never saw such funny mirrors as those were. I looked long and narrow and all kind of blue-colored in mine; and mamma looked all short and wide and pink-colored in hers. The only looking-glass that reflected naturally was the one Mercurius cracked with the lamp; and the cracks in that made you look as if you had two noses and two chins, so that papa would n't have known which chin to shave if he had tried that glass. Papa had written that it would be a relief to get away from the confusion of the city, and that he was longing to be where the latest edition of all the papers was n't being screamed at him; and we felt pleased to think that he would n't have anything like that to trouble him on the farm, where we never got any news at all, and where we did n't have any books to read, and only got the mail once in a while when Mr. Brown had an errand at the village. He said that it was better not to go for the mail every day,

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because you often got there and did n't find anything, whereas if you let it collect for a few days, you were sure of a nice batch.

We had been planning lots of nice excursions to take when papa came up, and when he got out of the wagon he seemed just delighted to be at the farm (Mercurius says "any one would be after coming up in that team"), and we talked over all the things we were going to do.

But on Sunday morning it began to rain, and when papa came down to breakfast, after sleeping on his hay bed, he seemed kind of sober and quiet; and he said that the coffee tasted the least like coffee of any he had ever drunk, and he could n't chew his beefsteak. And after Mr. Brown had told him he could n't smoke in the barn, he came in and said that there might be business which would call him back to town early in the week.

Then he went out and asked Mr. Brown if he could n't get him a Sunday paper, which was rather a funny thing to do, when he had

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wanted to get away from newspapers. But he did n't get one.

We hoped that it would clear off in the afternoon, so that we could all go to drive; but it only rained harder, and we all had to sit in the room with the air-tight stove. Mamma tried to play on the little old organ that was there; but it was so out of tune that she had to stop, and I guess papa thought it was worse than a hotel brass-band.

Then a great big thunder-storm came up, just as we thought it was clearing off; and it was the most awful thunder and lightning I ever saw, and we all thought that the farm-house was going to get struck. But it did n't, after all; and all the harm the thunder did was to turn the milk sour, so we could n't drink it for supper, which was a pity, as Mrs. Brown said she thought that bread and milk was about the best Sunday-night supper there was, and she had n't prepared anything else.

Papa said that he should go to bed early so as to get some sleep before the roosters

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began to crow; and he got some cotton wool and stuffed it in his ears, so as not to hear the noise of the other farm animals, and he said that he had enjoyed coming out to the farm ever so much, but that he should be obliged to go back to town by the first train Monday morning. And off he went, and he acted even more pleased when he drove off in the wagon with Mr. Brown than he had Saturday night, when he got there.

I don't think that they have very many things on a farm that they want, but they have a lot of things they don't want. They have "squash-bugs" on the squashes, and "potato-bugs" on the potatoes, and "mildew" on the corn, and the crows come and eat up the seeds that have just been planted in the ground, and it rains when they 're getting in the hay, and when they want it to rain it does n't, and the crops are all spoiled.

We 've got a picture hanging in our nursery called "The Barnyard," and I used to think that a real barnyard would be just like it; but it is n't, one bit. The pigs in the picture

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are as white and clean as if they had just been dry-cleansed, and they have pretty little curly tails, and you feel just as if you would like to pat them; and the sheep are as lovely as any that they have in the toy shops. But the real farm pigs are big and dirty, and they root around in the mud the whole time, and I would n't touch one for the world; and as for woolly sheep, they don't have them in the barnyard at all; only a few scattered way off on the hills, and they are as dingy and smutty-looking as they can be.

Then in our picture everything is all new and polished up, and the mowing-machines and wheelbarrows look as nice as the ones they have at the Mechanics' Fair. But the real thing is not a bit the same; for the mowing-machines are either all oily or rusty, and the paint is all off the wheelbarrows, and the tip-carts are all covered with mud.

We did n't stay as long at the farm as we thought we should, because mamma said that she was getting tired out instead of rested. She said she had never had so much anxiety

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in her life, or so many shocks to her nervous system; and that we had ruined all our clothes and worn out every pair of boots and shoes that we owned; and that a "simple farm diet" was a good deal more indigestible than anything we ever had at a hotel. And she could n't enjoy driving because the wagons were all so uncomfortable and we had to whip the horses the whole time to make them go.

And then Mrs. Brown was all the time complaining about us children. She was so neat that she did n't want to see one speck of dirt in her house; and every time that we came in without wiping our feet, which we did n't expect to do when we were boarding, she would run after us with a dustpan and brush up every little bit of mud.

She said that we "demanded" more than any other boarders she ever had, and that we wanted doughnuts between meals and kept teasing her for maple sugar. And Mr. Brown was terribly provoked because Mercurius let his old colt fall on his knees going down one

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of the hills, and he said he was "completely disabled" and he should make papa pay for him.

At first Mercurius and I tried to help Mr. Brown in different ways, but he was so ungrateful that we gave up doing it.

All he said when we helped him pick the peas for dinner was that we "tore down the vines;" and the day we dug potatoes with him, he said we "chopped more in two with the hoe than we got out whole," — which was not true, as we got out ever so many whole ones.

The day before we came away a very interesting thing happened.

Mrs. Brown had a great big black cat, which she was very fond of, and his name was "Black Diamond." He was named that by some of the boarders when he was small, as a joke, because he was black as a coal.

Chamomilla grew so fond of Black Diamond that she wanted to take him home with her, and she asked mamma to buy him from Mrs. Brown. But she would n't sell

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him, for she said she would as soon part with one of her family as her pet cat; and I guess she would have, for she didn't seem very fond of her family. However, we didn't want any of her family, for we had had more than enough of them, and they weren't so handsome as Black Diamond. That last day Chamomilla felt so badly at the thought of losing Diamond that she hardly let go of him for one minute, but kept carrying him around under her arm.

We were out in the shed trying to find some dried apples, when we saw a barrel full of something.

"What do you suppose is in that?" I said to Mercurius.

"It doesn't smell very good," Mercurius said, leaning over and sniffing into it.

"Does little Diamond want to see what is in the barrel?" Chamomilla said, lifting the cat up so that his nose was over the edge of the barrel.

Well, evidently Black Diamond did want to see what was in it, for just then he gave

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a jump out of Chamomilla's arms, and splash, he went right into the stuff in the barrel; and I guess he saw more than he wanted to, that time.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" Chamomilla began to cry, "he will be drowned! Get him out, Mercurius! get him out!"

Mercurius leaned over and grabbed him, and fished him out, and we looked at him, and a strange thing had happened! Black Diamond was n't black any longer! He had turned a queer shade of red. And he began to mew and mew, as if he did n't like the kind of bath he had had very much.

Just then, in came Mrs. Brown.

"What are you up to now?" she called out, "and what are you doing at that barrel of soft soap, I should like to know?"

"Is it soft soap?" Mercurius said. "If it is, I guess I don't want my hair shampooed in it, for I should come out a 'strawberry blonde.' Just look at the cat, will you! I think you 'd better change his name to Red Ruby."

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Would you believe it! The soft soap really had dyed the cat red.

I don't know how long poor Diamond stayed that color, for we came away the next morning. But we all felt dreadfully sorry for him, as Mrs. Brown said his hair would probably all fall out, on account of there being something so strong in the barrel of soft soap.

It was really a sad sight to see the poor red cat running out to the gate to bid Chamomilla good-by, and the last thing we saw as we rode away was Black Diamond sitting out in the garden and looking so mournful. Chamomilla thought he was really grieved to part with her, but Mercurius said it was only that he was sorry to be turned a different color. Whichever it was, Black Diamond was certainly a changed cat.

Mamma thought that Mr. and Mrs. Brown were glad to have us go, because they said that they should not take any children to board another year. But I guess they need not have grumbled, for papa paid them a good

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lot of money. I know, for I heard him say that, what with paying for the colt and the smashed wagons and a dozen other things, it was as expensive a summer as he had had for a long time. And he told mamma that we should have to wait awhile before we repainted the house or had a hard-wood floor put in the nursery.

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Chapter XII
The Wedding

COUSIN Marie Louise has married Mr. Jaffrey, and they have gone off on his yacht for a cruise, and they are going to land every time that Cousin Marie is sea-sick and stop at any hotel they like. Mercurius and I have always wanted to take a cruise on Mr. Jaffrey's yacht, but he has never taken us, and every time that we have asked Cousin Marie to get him to invite us, she has said, "You wait until we are married, and then you shall go on a cruise." That sounded very nice indeed; but now the very first chance that she had to

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take us, she has forgotten all about her promise, and gone off on that big yacht all alone with him, when there was plenty of room for all of us, and we might just as well have gone as not.

Mr. Jaffrey gave Cousin Marie a diamond star and a grand piano, and I don't see why Mercurius does n't like him. Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha and I have changed our minds about him, and we all think he is fine. Mercurius says that is because he gave us each a gold chain with a blue enamel locket on it, for being bridesmaids; but it is no such thing.

Mercurius has never been very agreeable to Mr. Jaffrey, and probably that is one reason he did n't care to invite him to go on the cruise. He heard Mercurius saying one day that he was n't half good enough to marry Cousin Marie, and he marched him right into the room where she was, and told him to repeat what he had said; and when Mercurius did repeat it, they both laughed and laughed as if it was a good joke.

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"I don't blame you for being jealous of me, Mercurius," Mr. Jaffrey said, "but I hope you'll feel more kindly towards me in time."

Mercurius says, however, that he never shall.

We all went up to Cousin Marie's house two or three days before the wedding, and we helped a great deal about arranging flowers and unpacking wedding presents. She lives quite far out in the country, so that there 's lots and lots of land around the house, and it takes about four hours to get there on the train.

Oh, but we had a great time up there, I can tell you, because we girls had been invited to be bridesmaids, and Cousin Marie wanted us to have all the fun we possibly could, and she begged us off from going to bed early, and let us have everything we liked to eat, and never made us do one thing we did n't want to.

You never saw such beautiful wedding presents as she had.

As fast as they came she wrote them right down in a little note-book so as to remember

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where they came from. Mercurius says that is because she wants to know how much to pay for their presents, if any of the people get married who have given her pretty things.

We helped her decide which presents she was going to exchange, and she said that our advice would have been a real help if we had n't all advised her differently about everything. You see I wanted her to keep the smooth silver, and Chamomilla thought the open-work kind was the prettiest, and Ipecacuanha did n't like any but the hammered-up pattern ; so Cousin Marie said that the only way to keep us from quarrelling was for her to make her own choice. She had nine soup-ladles and fifteen berry-spoons and twelve fancy cream-pitchers, and she had to keep the ones that were marked whether she liked them or not.

It was real exciting opening the presents as fast as they came, and every time the door-bell rang, I ran down as fast as I could, so as to be the first to help open the presents. Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha are so fond of

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copying everything that I do, that they thought they must run to the door, too, every time, and what did they do but try to grab a box from me which had a cut-glass bowl in it, and the whole thing fell on the floor and was smashed all to pieces; so they were forbidden to touch anything after that.

Cousin Marie's most intimate friend, Miss Ethel Staunton, was going to be maid-of-honor, and so she was there at the house the whole time we were. She was quite pretty, and wore stylish clothes, but we could not understand how Cousin Marie could want her for her very best friend. She took no more notice of us than if we had n't been visiting at the house at all, except to ask us if it was n't time for us to go to bed, or if we did n't want to go out and pick flowers, and there we were to be bridesmaids right with her, and going to walk down the church aisle ahead of her.

Mercurius and I would sit in the room just on purpose to plague her, when she was talking to Cousin Marie's brother or to some of

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the ushers, and she would try her best to get us to run off.

"Why don't you and Mercurius go and play a set of tennis?" she would say, as if her one thought was to make us have a good time.

"We 're too hot to play tennis just now," we would tell her; and then we would rock back and forth in two big rocking-chairs, because we knew it made her nervous.

"If you are hot, how nice it would be for you to go out in that cool place in the grove!" she would go on.

"We think it 's cooler here in the house," Mercurius would say, grinning at me.

"Well, I am glad that you enjoy it here," she would say pretty soon, trying not to show how much provoked she was. "I think it 's really pleasanter out on the veranda." And then she and the young man would get up and go outside. We would wait until they were all nicely settled on the piazza, and then we would follow them out and I would say to Mercurius, —

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"Oh, it *is* ever so much nicer out here, after all, is n't it?" and then we would sit on the railing as near to them as we could get, and swing our heels and watch them trying to pretend they did n't care whether we stayed or not.

I guess it sometimes pays to be nice to the children as well as to the grown folks.

Aunt Delia came up the night before the wedding, and she got everybody nervous because she said the house was likely to be broken into at any moment with so many valuable presents known to be there. And she talked about it, until she got us all so scared we did n't dare to go to sleep. She said that she had just been through such an experience that it was n't any wonder she was easily alarmed. She had been staying at Cousin Charlie's when it happened, and this is the way it was.

They are all awfully afraid of burglars at Cousin Charlie's house, and he has everything valuable packed up every night and carried upstairs, and he wakes up and listens to every

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sound, because he says he wants to protect his family in case of emergency.

I guess that he is just about as much afraid for himself as he is for his family, for he has a very loud whistle in his room to whistle out of the window with, if he ever wants to call in a policeman, and he says his whistle is far better than Aunt Delia's watchman's rattle which she always carries around with her.

Well, while Aunt Delia was visiting Cousin Charlie, the waitress at his house thought she would go to early church, and she set her alarm clock at four, and something was the matter with it, so that it waked her up at half-past two. The waitress got all dressed and ready to start out before she found that she had been waked up too early, and then she didn't want to go to bed again, so she decided to set the breakfast-table and do some work downstairs while she was waiting. She took her boots off, and walked round in her stocking feet as quietly as she knew how, so as not to wake up any of the family.

But Cousin Charlie is such a light sleeper

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that he wakes up at the least bit of a sound, and he heard some one walking round downstairs, and he jumped up and listened, and every now and then he heard the silver rattling and he decided that there were burglars in the house. Then Cousin Charlie ran and opened his window and took his burglar-whistle and blew it just as loud as he knew how, because he said he did n't have the heart to shoot at any human being. Mercurius says he guesses he could n't hit one if he did have the heart, he is such a poor shot.

After all, it was just as well he did n't try that time, because he might have killed the waitress, and she is the best one they ever had, and knows how to arrange the flowers when they have company, and sprinkles ferns over the table-cloth without a bit of help from any one.

When Cousin Charlie blew his whistle, it was n't heard by any policeman, but it waked up Aunt Delia and a good many of the neighbors.

Aunt Delia was sleeping in the room over

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Cousin Charlie, and when she heard his whistle she ran to the window and began to shake her watchman's rattle, because she thought if there were burglars in the house, they would come and steal her gold watch and cameo breastpin. When Cousin Charlie heard her rattle going off, he supposed that Aunt Delia had heard the burglars too, and he kept on blowing his whistle all the louder until a number of the neighbors got up and ran over to see what was the matter.

Well, when the waitress heard the whistle blowing and the rattle making such a dreadful noise, she thought of course there must be burglars in the house, and she stopped setting the breakfast-table and ran up to her room without even waiting to get her boots, and locked herself in.

Cousin Charlie felt a good deal braver when he saw several of the neighbors coming up the steps, and he called out to them to catch the burglar if he ran out. Then he and his wife and Aunt Delia all got candles and marched round the house hunting after the

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burglar, and I guess they were pretty sure that he had gone by that time. Well, when they saw the silver spread out in the dining-room they got excited enough, and the neighbors came in and said that the burglar was about to "decamp" with it, when he was frightened off by Cousin Charlie's whistle, and then somebody found the waitress's boots and the neighbors said that was a "very valuable clew."

Then somebody said that the man must have very small feet, and Cousin Charlie's wife looked at them and said they must have been left by a "woman burglar," because they had high heels and very pointed toes.

The neighbors asked Cousin Charlie if much of the silver was gone, and he said he could n't tell, because the waitress usually took it all upstairs, and only part of it was there.

Then they all went upstairs, and it was a long time before they could get the waitress to open her door, because she thought the burglars were after her; but when she did

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open it, they found all the rest of the silver safe enough, though the poor waitress was so frightened that she gave notice to leave, and Cousin Charlie had to raise her wages to make her stay.

I guess that Cousin Charlie felt cheap enough when he found that he had made all that fuss just because the waitress had tried to set the table for breakfast before she went to early church, and neither he nor Aunt Delia could tell which was the most useful, the whistle or the watchman's rattle, because neither of them had been heard by any policeman, and the neighbors could n't tell which had frightened them the most.

And that was the dreadful experience that Aunt Delia had been through, and she said that it was little wonder that she should feel timid after it.

Mercurius said he thought so too; only the thing to be afraid of was not burglars, but having the breakfast-table set too early.

I guess that 's something that Mercurius has always been afraid of.

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Well, no burglars came to steal Cousin Marie's wedding presents, and I think it was just as well for them that they kept away, for Aunt Delia was expecting them, and had her rattle all ready to go off, and she got Cousin Marie to put the big St. Bernard dog in the room with the presents, and all the good he did there was to tip over a little gold table with six lovely cups on it and break every one of them. Cousin Marie had so many handsome presents that I don't believe the burglars would have been able to choose which to take if they had come.

Cousin Marie Louise was just the prettiest bride you ever saw, and I heard a good many people say that Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha and I were "as lovely as we could be." We each carried a basket of rosebuds, and sprinkled them, as we went along, for the bride to walk on. We were all dressed in pink muslins, with big pink hats which tied under our chins and had long pink feathers on them.

The country people were all so fond of Cousin Marie that they sent up the brass

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band to play her a serenade the afternoon before the wedding. It was the most countrified brass band I ever saw, and they all wore different kinds of clothes, so that none of them matched, and I thought they were a lot of tramps when I saw them coming up the driveway.

Mercurius said to me that he knew a way to have some fun with the "hayseeds," as he called them, and he made Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha promise to do just as he said, and then he ran into the kitchen and got four lemons. He gave us each a lemon, and told us to wait until he gave the signal, and then all begin to suck them, and we would see some sport.

Well, we did. When the brass band got up to the house Cousin Marie was resting, as she was all tired out after counting her wedding presents, and she did n't want to hear them play at all, but she knew that they would be disappointed if she did n't come down and thank them; so she hurried down to the piazza, and when they saw her coming

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the band began to play "There's Music in the Air," as loud as they could.

They had just started in, when Mercurius gave us the signal, and we all suddenly got up from the grass where we were sitting, and stood right in front of the band and began to suck the lemons. And all at once the band made the queerest squeaking, and stopped. Then they tried to go on again, but they could n't seem to, and they stood holding their instruments and moving their lips and staring at us, while we kept right on sucking the lemons; and it was hard work, too, for they were as sour as they could be.

Mercurius was just tickled to death.

"They can't one of them pucker when they see us sucking lemons," he whispered to me.

Cousin Marie could n't understand what had happened to them, and she stood there on the piazza smiling and nodding, and thinking that they were sort of embarrassed at seeing her, while the leader kept getting redder and redder in the face. At last he burst out, "Take away them children!"

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"What are you doing, children?" Cousin Marie called down to us; and then we all turned around as meek as could be, and held our hands behind us and said, "We're waiting to hear the music."

"Well, so am I," she said, looking real puzzled.

"Play, will you!" the leader shouted out; and they all began again on "Music in the Air," while we waited until they had played about half a verse and then we began again on the lemons. In just about one minute not one man could blow his old brass instrument, and, my! but they were mad. They just turned round without so much as looking at Cousin Marie, and marched off without saying a word; and Mercurius said it was just as well they did n't try to say anything, because if they had they would probably have regretted it afterwards.

And then we four sat down on the grass and clapped and clapped as they walked away, and Mercurius kept calling out, "My! are n't they fine players?" "There's more

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music in the air than in that band," and "Give us one more tune before you go." But they never once turned their heads.

Cousin Marie never would have known what made the band play so queerly if Mr. Jaffrey had n't been coming across the lawn just in time to see us sucking the lemons, and so of course we had a pretty bad scolding, though not a very long one, because everybody was too busy to stop, and Mercurius had to take a note of apology from Cousin Marie down to the band, and she invited them to come up again in the evening to play to her, but they would n't.

When it was time to go to the wedding, we were driven down in hacks to the little stone church in the village, and the church was all decorated with flowers and had pretty green arches across the aisle for us to walk under.

Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha were to go first, side by side, and then I was to come, and then the maid-of-honor; but when we got to the church we had to go differently, because Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha began to make

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a fuss on the way down. They said that they were afraid to go first, and that they had forgotten how fast they ought to walk, and they wanted to get out of the carriage and run back to the house and hide.

Miss Staunton, who was in the hack with us, tried to talk them into behaving, but she only got them all worked up, and I saw them beginning to wink and swallow, and knew that in a minute more they would get their eyes and noses all red; so I whispered to them to keep quiet, and when we got to the church I would slip in ahead of them and walk down the aisle first.

And I did. I was n't afraid of being looked at, or of not knowing how fast to walk, and I had wanted to go first all the time; and as I went by several pews, I heard people saying, "What a lovely child!"

Mercurius was mad because he could n't be an usher, or best man, or anything but a "relative in one of the front pews," and he just scowled at me as I passed by the place where he sat.

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He wanted to come over in the carriage with us, but he was put in with Aunt Delia, so that he would be sure to behave. He said that she scolded him all the way over, and so he kept stepping on her long black satin train as she walked up the aisle. Of course he pretended that he did it accidentally, and kept begging her pardon, and once he walked so far up her train that she had to stop short, and he said she stopped so suddenly that he thought her back hair was going to drop off.

I should think that Aunt Delia ought to know by this time that it does n't pay to scold Mercurius when he is cross. He did one thing while the marriage service was going on which he would have been punished for if he had n't pretended that the flowers gave him hay-fever. There was a pause after Mr. Jaffrey said "with all my worldly goods I thee endow;" and then Mercurius cleared his throat with a regular loud "ahem," which made some of the people look round and try not to smile. Mamma said that if Mercurius had cleared his throat in any other place it

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would n't have mattered, but that on account of Mr. Jaffrey's being so rich it seemed almost as if he had cleared his throat on purpose, — which of course he had.

When we got back to the house, we all stood up in a line and shook hands with people, and they said that we children need n't do it; but I preferred to do just what the maid-of-honor did, so I kept right beside her every minute.

All the relations kissed the bride, and she had to make believe she liked it, and nearly everybody said the same thing to Mr. Jaffrey, and then the people went off to the dining-room to eat the wedding breakfast, while the bridal couple had to just stand there for about two hours without a thing to eat. I guess that getting married is no more fun than being at your own party. You 're not there to enjoy yourself, but just to amuse the other people.

By and by some one said, " Will Mrs. Jaffrey come and cut the cake ? " and I started to say, " Why, I thought Cousin Marie was

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going to do that," when I remembered that she was Mrs. Jaffrey now, "from this time forth forevermore," unless she got divorced or married some one after Mr. Jaffrey's death.

She cut the bride's cake, and all of her young lady friends had slices, and so did we for being bridesmaids, and everybody tried to find the ring. I was just passing a piece to Chamomilla, because it was too small for me, when I saw something glittering near the edge of it. "Here, Chamomilla," I said, taking back the plate, "this is a horrid little piece, I 'll get you one that 's bigger;" and so I got the ring in Cousin Marie's cake.

It was good fun to see the bride go off, and we all pelted her with rice and rose leaves; and when she started to come downstairs she threw down her bouquet right at the maid-of-honor; but she was such a "muff" she could n't catch it, and I just made a dive for it and grabbed it and ran away with it before any one else could get one bit of it, except Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha, who ran out after me and tried to snatch it, and they

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both pulled so hard at it that it was torn all into little bits, and so we left it on the floor in the reception-room.

Ipecacuanha and Chamomilla did n't care to stand in line, and so they went up to the room where all the presents were, while the reception was going on. There was a man up there who stood right near the door the whole time, and never went downstairs to see the bride at all, and Mercurius could n't understand why he just stood there and never went to get a thing to eat, and so he went and asked him if he was invited, and he said he guessed he was; he was paid for coming.

Mercurius thought that was very queer; so he went and asked Aunt Delia why that man upstairs was paid, and she said he was paid to keep an eye on the presents.

Mercurius said he thought it was a pretty good joke not to be afraid to run the risk of having burglars steal your things, but to be scared to trust your friends and relations in the room with them. Then he went upstairs again to watch the man, and he stared at him

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for such a long time that the man got cross and told Mercurius that he'd better step out and let other people have a little more room.

When Mercurius found that the man was n't going to be pleasant to him, he decided to try and see how smart he was at catching people if they took anything; and what did Mercurius do, but get close up to an old lady who had one of those outside pockets hanging at her side to hold her best lace handkerchief, and he slipped a long-handled gold spoon into it, and of course the handle stuck way out.

Well, then Mercurius watched to see if the man would notice the spoon, and sure enough he did.

The old lady was one of Mr. Jaffrey's rich aunts who had come about a hundred miles to see him married, and she had given him a whole solid silver service with knives and forks to match; and the first thing she knew that man had hold of her arm and was pointing to the gold spoon sticking out of her pocket. Then Chamomilla and Ipecacuanha said there was a big time!

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Of course the man thought that the old lady was trying to steal the long-handled spoon, and the other people in the room thought she had "keptomania," or some disease which makes people take things that they can afford to buy. Mercurius says that if you have that disease you can steal most anything and not get punished. I don't think that is very fair, for I should say that people who steal things they don't need, just for the fun of taking them, ought to be punished a good deal worse than people who only steal because they want things awfully and just can't get them any other way.

Well, when Mr. Jaffrey's aunt found that the man thought she was trying to steal, she was so mad she could n't speak, and she only stood and breathed for some time, and rolled her eyes round; then she said, "Send for my nephew, and I will ask him what kind of people he has brought me among!"

Oh, I wish I had been up there then, instead of being kissed by a lot of relations down-stairs!

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The next thing that happened was all for the best, and it was done by Ipecacuanha.

She told on Mercurius. She was so scared when she saw that there was going to be a big fuss that she ran and pulled hold of the other arm of Mr. Jaffrey's aunt, and screamed out, "Oh, it was Mercurius put the spoon in your pocket! I saw him do it! Mercurius did it!"

Then everybody looked for Mercurius, but he was not there, and Ipecacuanha was glad of that. And he knew enough to keep out of sight until the reception was about over, and then he gradually came out for just long enough to get the waiters to bring him heaping plates of ice-cream and salad. He felt safe in doing that, because he knew that there was so much excitement going on that he would probably get off from any punishment, and when he saw the aunt with the pocket drive off in her carriage, he felt so safe that he stood around just as calm and natural as anybody else, only he pinched Ipecacuanha every time he went by her, and she kept out of his way, I can tell you.

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We all had old slippers to throw after the bridal couple, and Mercurius found a great big boot; and when I asked him what he was going to do with it, he said he was going to have a parting shot at Mr. Jaffrey to pay him for the shaking he once gave him; and he did hit him right between the shoulders as he was getting into the carriage.

The ushers had tied up the carriage with white ribbons, and put flowers on the hubs of the wheels, and it looked too funny for anything.

"Oh, won't the people at the station stare at them, when they see the white ribbons and the old satin slipper fastened on top?" I said to Mercurius.

"Humph!" he said, "you're easily fooled if you think they are going to the station in that. They've got another hack down the road by the stile and they are going to change into it, and Cousin Marie's black steamer trunk is strapped on behind it. Come, Belladonna, quick, we'll run across the field and see the last of them."

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He took hold of my hand, and we just tore down through the pasture back of the house and across to the little stile.

Sure enough, there they were, just getting out of the carriage with the white satin ribbons on it.

"I 'm going to see the last of the bridal couple," I called out to them, and I climbed up on to a high rock by the side of the road, while Mercurius ran round behind the carriage they were getting into. I saw that he had a piece of white chalk in his hand, but I did n't know what he was going to do with it. In a minute he came scrambling up on to the rock beside me, and we both waved and waved as the carriage went by us. When it had gone by, I saw what Mercurius had chalked on the black steamer trunk. And what do you think he had written? "SOLD," in great big letters.

I think it was a horrid thing for him to do, and not the least bit funny.

As Mr. Jaffrey and Cousin Marie drove away, I kissed my hand to them, and Mer-

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curius called out, "Good-by, Cousin Marie. I wish you many happy returns of the day."

She did look so beautiful in her new travelling-suit, and Mr. Jaffrey looked so handsome and so smiling, that I was real provoked with Mercurius for putting on those great big staring letters; and so, just as Cousin Marie leaned out of the carriage window to wave good-by to us, I shoved Mercurius right off the rock, and down he rolled backward into the grass, where he was out of sight and could not see the last of them.

And I stood all alone on the big rock, waving my new hat with the long pink plumes with one hand, and throwing kisses with the other, while Cousin Marie called out to me, "Good-by, my pretty little bridesmaid; good-by, dear Belladonna."

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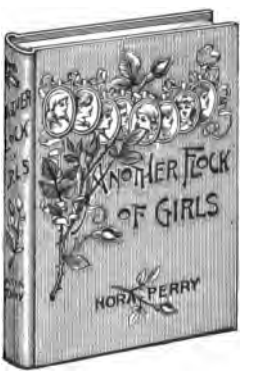

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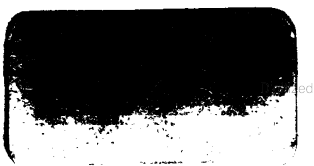

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